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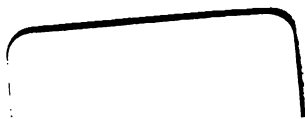
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MINNIE'S MISSION.

An Australian Temperance Tale.

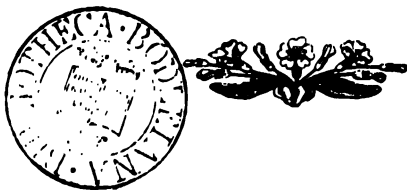


MINNIE'S MISSION.

An Australian Temperance Tale.

BY

MAUD JEAN FRANC.



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CONTENTS.

<i>Chapter.</i>	<i>Page.</i>
I. THE END OF A VOYAGE . . .	1
II. NEW SCENES AND NEW FRIENDS . .	10
III. GLEN LEWIN	19
IV. FAMILY GREETINGS	29
V. THE RIDING LESSON	38
VI. COUSIN JOHN ON TEMPERANCE . .	47
VII. THE TOWNSHIP OF CLINTON . . .	57
VIII. THE CAMPBELLS AND THEIR HOME .	66
IX. THE DEPARTURE	76
X. RENEWAL OF ACQUAINTANCE . . .	85
XI. A MIDNIGHT SURPRISE	97
XII. THE MISSION IN WORKING ORDER .	107
XIII. MINNIE'S FRESH HOPE	116
XIV. A RIDE FOR ADVICE	125
XV. THE PLEDGE ADMINISTERED . . .	135
XVI. THE ORGIES OF BACCHUS, AND THE RE- SULT	144
XVII. LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS . . .	154

<i>Chapter.</i>	<i>Page.</i>
XVIII. MINNIE'S COADJUTOR	166
XIX. EDWIN'S COMMISSION	178
XX. EDWIN'S MARRIAGE	191
XXI. THE END OF LIFE	204
XXII. THE CLOSING SCENE	220
XXIII. MINNIE'S PLEDGE-BOOK.	233
XXIV. HELP	247
XXV. MINNIE'S BOOK AGAIN	262
XXVI. FLOODING THE CELLAR	274
XXVII. "SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD"	285

MINNIE'S MISSION.

An Australian Temperance Tale.

CHAPTER I.

THE END OF A VOYAGE.

"Happiness is a road-side flower, growing on the highway of usefulness !
Plucked, it shall wither in thy hand ! passed by, it is fragrance to thy
spirits :

Love not thine own soul, regard not thine own weal.
Trample the thyme beneath thy feet ; be useful, and be happy."

LIGHTLY over the curling wave the good ship *Falcon* sped her way, as though conscious that her voyage was nearly over, and, like a thing of life, rejoicing in land and rest. It was evening, and a glorious evening ; for though in one of our winter months, when cold and rain and storm are wont to prevail, nature had just put on her loveliest garb for such a season, and a rosy sunset sent floods of crimson glory all over the rippling waters, tinting the white spray with vermilion, and lighting up the distant heights of Kangaroo Island with strange beauty.

The cabins were forsaken ; all over the poop and deck, and on every available elevation, the passengers were scattered, feasting their eyes upon this ravishing

sight of land that had risen like a fairy vision of beauty before them. How fair it seemed after that long voyage! What hopes were raised, what feelings excited by that first view of the strange land to which they were bound! All was joyous bewilderment; eyes and tongues were busily engaged, and many and bright were the anticipations of the scenes that to-morrow's sunlight would reveal, by which time they expected to be safely in port.

And beautiful it certainly did look, those sunset-glowing heights rising from the very margin of the sea, washed by its foam, and caressed by its ripples. It was a sight worth seeing, and none perhaps felt and silently acknowledged this more than Minnie Rayton, one of the few lady passengers the *Falcon* contained, who, standing a little apart from the rest, leaning over the side of the vessel, was feasting her eyes with the fresh naive beauty before her, till something of the sunset glow swept her own pale cheek.

Minnie Rayton, herself, was an interesting study, particularly as she stood there; her whole face glowing with emotion, and beaming with intellect: she was not pretty, yet nevertheless attractive. Something in the fine sweep of the brow, with its abundant dark hair, something in the fine eyes and their ample fringe, something in the whole expression of the face rendered it so; and after all, that was the one secret of Minnie's attractiveness—its *expression*: that, and the sweetness of a very sweet smile, made

it well worth while to court her favour. The deep mourning in which she was dressed gave greater interest to her appearance; and the graceful propriety of manner with which she had made the long voyage alone, the evident trust and confidence she possessed in the right feeling of those around her, inspired respect and admiration, and not one had the hardihood to destroy her faith or shake it from its moorings.

Minnie Rayton was an orphan. She had lost both parents in one short month, and been left entirely to the kind feeling and friendliness of almost strangers, till the tidings of her brother's death, and the destitute condition of her niece, that brother's only child, reached her uncle, a wealthy sheep-farmer in South Australia, and brought back, quickly as steam could bring it, a large remittance for her immediate benefit, and a warm invitation to our fair southern land. Minnie asked herself but few questions—permitted herself no fear. It was clearly her duty and privilege to accept the invitation, and it was immediately and gratefully done; and so, committed to the especial care of the captain by some of the friends who saw her depart, one fine autumnal day she embarked from the shores of Old England, and turned at once her face and thoughts to the new home that bade her welcome in the distance.

And now the voyage was nearly at an end, the fair southern land looming in the distance. It had been a pleasant voyage after all, with but little of the rough or boisterous phases of sea life. Minnie had.

gratefully to remember hereafter, kind attentions from the captain and his lady, and many a weary hour beguiled of its tedium by agreeable association with her fellow-passengers.

The cabin passengers were but few, and with but these Minnie had come in contact. They consisted of Mrs. Spacton and her two daughters, pretty girls of sixteen and thirteen years, returning from a visit to England, and all impatience to revisit old, familiar haunts, and the dear Australian home; a young sheep-farmer from the north, also on his return to his station; two or three Adelaide tradesmen with their wives, who had combined in one business and pleasure, during a brief sojourn in England, and, fully sated with all they had seen, were hailing the approaching shores with many demonstrations of pleasure. These were all residents of Australia, and each had something to tell Minnie in its favour; but Minnie was not the only unsophisticated passenger on board, not the only one who waked for the first time on the shores, fast melting into outlines with the increasing haze of evening resting upon them. At a short distance from where she stood, slowly walking up and down the deck, a small cigar between his lips, and his arms rather moodily folded, a gentleman was turning from time to time a curious eye upon the scene before him, new to him, as it was to her; for this was his first voyage, and therefore his first visit to Australian shores

He might have numbered thirty summers, perhaps even more, but evidently not less, for there was every appearance of maturity about him. For the rest, a tall, finely developed figure, fine dark blue eyes, and abundant light brown curly hair, added to a polished and refined address, made him no common object of interest to his fellow-passengers. He was a medical man, proceeding to establish himself in an Australian country practice. He had already formed friendships with his cabin companions, and indeed with many in the steerage, by his kind and skilful attentions in time of sickness; and both in his capacity of medical and general adviser, had made rapid progress in Minnie's esteem: the more easily so, as he never aspired to any higher position in her favour.

After a few more turns backwards and forwards on the poop, he suddenly tossed the end of his cigar into the waves, and taking up a scarlet shawl that one of the ladies on retiring to the cabin had left behind her, approached Minnie Rayton, who was still so busily absorbed with the prospect before her, and her own many thoughts, to observe that he was near her, as most of the other passengers had quitted the deck.

"There is a dampness in the air, Miss Rayton," he exclaimed, lightly throwing the shawl over her shoulders as he spoke. "The haze over yonder glorious hills is increasing. We shall have you ill again."

"Are they not lovely, Doctor Leigh?" she returned, in low tones of admiration, as she accepted his assistance, and folded the shawl round her. "It is so pleasant, so very pleasant, to see land again."

"Yes," he replied with a smile; "and to give up this idle, do-nothing kind of existence, and emerge into positive work—eh? I suppose," he continued, with a half-sigh, "too much of this sort of thing would not be good for us."

"It would not," said Minnie thoughtfully. "We are active creatures, and need action."

"You are," smiled her companion.

"And are not you? Ah yes; I am sure of it. Inactivity is not your forte, doctor. Even in this little world you have found a mission to perform."

"I love my ease," was the smiling reply.

"Yes," said Minnie; "repose after labour is sweet, all the sweeter for the labour. I envy you, Doctor Leigh. You have a mission in the world; as to me, I appear a mere waif cast upon the surface of society—an idle do-nothing in the world's busy hive. But I detest this butterfly existence; I want to work; I want to have a mission resting upon me."

He looked at her for a few moments in silent admiration. The dark eyes that were resting on the rapidly fading scenery were glistening with emotion; and the cheek, half turned to him, was flushed. That she was in sober earnest he saw.

"You have one," he presently answered, in low, measured tones; "every woman has a mission, though

all may not exert themselves for the fulfilment. Nay," he continued, "I should rather say a variety of missions, for certainly all have not the same; they differ with circumstances; nor are all conscious when performing the missions deputed to them."

"I am not, for one. I have always been so tenderly nurtured and cared for, that there has seemed but little left for me to do."

"What! no wants to minister to—no pain to soothe? Nay, Miss Rayton; has your pathway really led you so entirely beyond the simple duties of womankind—those loving duties that none but woman can perform? I trow not."

He had brought the tears in earnest now, though he had little intended to do it. A glance at the mourning dress, the crape yet freshly folded upon it, revealed the cause.

"I did not mean that, Doctor Leigh," she presently replied in low tones; "though of that description of duty, I have had few circumstances—but little comparative experience."

"And yet it is an important part of woman's mission," he returned gravely, "and follows closely on what you are pleased to term mine. In fact, we doctors should frequently do but little with our patients without the administrations of gentle woman: her hand to soothe, her voice to comfort, her skill to arrange, are inestimable. You are not very old yet, Miss Rayton," he continued presently, relapsing into

a smile, "and the undiscovered mission may lie before you. *Work* do you need? Australia is the very place for that, if we may judge from report. Believe me, I expect my portion of it."

"And accept it thankfully?" laughed Minnie.

"Did I not tell you that I loved my ease?" he asked smilingly, offering his arm, for the shadows were gathering fast, and the haze was now falling in thin, drizzling rain.

"And now, Miss Rayton," he exclaimed, as they entered the saloon together, "this is our last social evening; you must for once overcome your prejudices, and consent to drink our mutual welfare and happiness in this new land."

"My prejudices are very strong, doctor, as you know by this time," said Minnie, half smiling. "You cannot persuade me to do what my conscience tells me is not right."

"But you have taken no pledge?"

"No *outward* pledge, certainly. Nevertheless, I have forsworn the juice of the grape in any other form than this;" and she took up a bunch of fine muscatels from a dish on the table as she spoke. "Drink," she continued, "if you must, if you *will*. You must please be satisfied by my *eating* to the success and happiness of our party in the new land we are approaching. I can do no more."

"What if I take it into my head as your medical adviser to order you wine as a medicine?"

"At present I am not sick," said Minnie, rather

archly; "and if I were, I believe I should, after all, use my own discretion in the matter."

"Incorrigible as ever!" was the doctor's low response, but he looked neither angry nor disturbed at her refusal.

CHAPTER II.

NEW SCENES AND NEW FRIENDS.

"A cheerful expecter of the best hath a fountain of joy in him."

THE bright morning sun soon dispelled the thin, filmy haze that had gathered over the port, as the *Falcon* made her entrance, and sunshine does much to beautify and refresh what would often look very blank and desolate without it. Sooth to say, our southern port—though it has seen a few modern improvements of late, and is still making slow, sloth-like movements that may be termed progressive—was, in the days when the little *Falcon* cast anchor thereat, but a miserable disgrace to our fair land, and little calculated to impress a stranger favourably on his entrance. But, as we said before, the mere sight of land was good, especially land bedewed with such a sunshine, and Minnie was too glad at the prospect of once more setting foot upon *terra firma*,—too rejoiced at the prospect of once more possessing a home with relations, and not mere friends around her,—to be very critical. We verily believe she paid little regard to the meagre, dwarf-looking dwellings, which at that time sprang up like ill-conditioned mushrooms around, and little regarded the state of the roads, which the recent rains had reduced into anything but a macadamized condition.

The passengers were all on the poop as they entered the port, most of them eagerly on the look-out for friends on shore. Among the number were Minnie Rayton and Doctor Leigh.

"Did you not say your uncle resided near a place called Clinton?" asked that gentleman, as he stood once more by the young lady's side, just as the *Falcon* cast her anchor.

"Yes," replied Minnie; "I believe so."

"And the name of his station is?—"

"Glen Lewin," said Minnie, smiling; "a pretty, romantic name, is it not?"

"Very; but your uncle is not Scotch?"

"No; but my aunt is of Scotch parentage. The name is, I believe, given in her honour. It is about five or six miles from Clinton."

"As much as that? Do you know, Miss Rayton, I have just made a discovery. Mr. Bartmann, a young German friend and old schoolchum of mine, who has just come on board to welcome me, tells me that Clinton is the place to which I am likely to be appointed. We shall therefore, doubtless, meet again; and I may yet have the happiness of seeing you in the performance of your mission. Till then, permit me to wish you good-bye, for I see your friends approaching, if I mistake not." He shook her hand warmly, and walked rapidly away.

Her friends? Yes, surely they must be, for they were now very near her: a tall, portly, middle-aged gentleman, with a very florid complexion, and a

strong tendency to corpulency ; and with him a tall, not ungraceful young man, with hair and eyes the same colour as her own, and a complexion something like his father's, for father and son they decidedly were, and as decidedly her uncle John and cousin Harry, though she vainly searched her memory for any likeness that had been stored there. If that indeed was her uncle, he was strangely altered.

That there was no hesitation as to her identity on their part was quickly manifested. They approached her instantly with such a warmth of manner, and cordial welcome, that her affections were at once enlisted, and all reserve banished.

"Minnie, my darling!" cried her uncle; "I should have known you among a thousand! Why, Harry, she is the exact image of your poor uncle Herbert. Were you not considered so, my dear?"

"Yes; always, uncle."

"Why, we have been waiting in town some days for your arrival; the *Falcon* is rather behind time, I fancy; but now we have you, that's right. Come away at once; you must be dreadfully sick of the sea by this time, and of all upon the vessel."

"It was not an unpleasant voyage, uncle."

"Glad of it, glad of it. Captain's a fine man, I hear. Well, come ashore at once, though. Is your luggage at hand?"

"Yes, uncle; here it is,"

"I will see after it. Here, Harry," he continued, "take charge of your cousin, while I look after the

boxes and pay my duty to the captain ;" and off he went, puffing and blowing like a small steam-engine.

"You did not recognise me, I suppose," said her cousin, as they passed on shore together, and walked towards a comfortable-looking trap that stood at a short distance awaiting their arrival.

"Oh no," replied Minnie. "Remember, we were only a boy and girl when we parted; I, too, .am greatly changed."

"But you are a true Rayton. I think I should have recognised you by the likeness."

How strange were Minnie's feelings, as she left the ship, that had so long been her home behind her, to venture on new and untried paths. It was strange, notwithstanding the kind warmth of both uncle and cousin; and all that met her eye was strange and unhome-like too; yet she rather liked it. Life here was evidently everywhere in action. Might not her mission in time develop itself? Might there not be work for her to do in Australia, also?

Still it was very dream-like and unreal: the transition from the restless ocean, to dry, solid land, had something astonishingly like witchcraft in it. It was in a dream she stood by, watching the careful arrangement of her boxes; and then submitted to be handed to her seat by her cousin; in a dream she looked at everything as they flew past. "Was every place bare and unpromising as that port-road?" she thought; "how thoroughly un-English it looked."

And yet they were English faces that greeted her

everywhere; English in all but that want of freshness, that lack of colour, so peculiar to our colonies; the bloom scared from lip and cheek by the hot wind and scorching sun.

"Don't judge our country by its port, cousin Minnie," laughed Harry, after an attentive and amused side-long view of her puzzled and dream-like and scarcely satisfied face. "We have better to show you than this, I assure you."

"Confound the port," growled his father. "It's enough to scare any new comer out of his wits: it's a disgrace to the country. But don't you be scared, Minnie, my child; we have better to show you at Glen Lewin, and I only intend to stay long enough in Adelaide to lunch. Auntie will be on the look out for us to-night."

Minnie was not disappointed, but pleased with Adelaide, as they drove at length more leisurely through it. She had not anticipated a town of such magnitude, and the surprise was an agreeable one. But the distant view of the beautiful range of hills that next broke upon her vision more than compensated for the port and its deficiencies.

"You like the country?" questioned her cousin, archly.

"I do indeed!" said Minnie, warmly. "Especially a country with such hills as those for a back-ground. I was not prepared for anything so beautiful."

They were beautiful, lovely, glowing in the morning sunshine; and green and velvety, for the grass

was in perfection. What an exquisite green, and how unlike the hue of the English grass! It had caught its bright, yellow-green tint from the sun-beam, surely. The English grass was blue-green in colour, beautiful, not less brilliant to the eye. It was only in the distance that she saw it at present, for they were in the streets of Adelaide now; and presently her cousin drove into the yard of a large hotel in King William Street, where they dismounted: and where Minnie in a neat little bedroom had the pleasure of washing with some of the water from the mighty river Torrens, greatly refreshing herself by the process, while her mental vision cleared, and she was able more quietly to review the future.

Refreshment she took in more ways than one; for her first action in solitude was one of very earnest, humble thanksgiving to Him, who had so safely guided her across the ocean, and brought her to a pleasant land and kind friends, with her health and spirits buoyant and unimpaired, and her desires to serve Him and to do His will wherever her lot might be cast, as fervent as ever. She had early given her heart to God—early sought His love, and found it. She knew therefore that she was in safe-keeping, for has He not promised to “keep His own”? She had no fears to torment her for the future; that she trusted to Him, and at present all seemed smooth and pleasant.

One thing struck her painfully, the fear that both uncle and cousin were yet far from God; yet with

hearts and life wholly engrossed by earth and earthly objects, the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choking the word, and rendering it unfruitful. No word, no sign of anything else had passed them, while, on the contrary, much of their conversation was mingled with expressions no Christian could or would indulge in. With this fear begun. She prayed earnestly to be kept steadfast and unmovable, willing to bear the reproach of the Cross, if reproach it should be esteemed, and anxious to bring no disgrace on the cause she loved, by weak compliance.

She went downstairs after this, very much strengthened in all her resolves—certainly not the least so in one—the strength of which she expected immediately to be tested; namely, the “prejudices,” as Doctor Leigh called them, against all alcoholic liquors. She had certainly taken no outward pledge, but in her view of the matter, the inward pledge was quite as binding on her conscience, and was besides entirely unconditional; for worlds she would not break it. How could she, with the memory of that scene before her that first induced her to take the vow, now sacredly kept for three years—a scene familiar and common enough in the world’s metropolis, but one that had never so conspicuously displayed itself to her eyes as it did that night from which she dated her renunciation of all fermented drinks. Minnie had been with a party of friends to a lecture at Exeter Hall, and on their return, a woman, if indeed she be deserving of the name, reeling with intoxica-

tion, shouting and laughing under the maddening influence of liquor, crossed their path, holding in her feeble, imbecile grasp an infant of a few months old, whose bitter wailing struck Minnie to the heart. The noise it made, and the mother's wild laughter, speedily brought a policeman to the spot; but no sooner did the wretched creature catch a glimpse of him, than she reeled instantly across the road, disregarding the traffic, only intent on eluding his grasp. An omnibus driving at full speed, bore rapidly down upon her, and before they had time to draw up the horses, she was thrown down, dashing at the same time the infant she so feebly held from her arms and under the wheels of a heavy wagon. She herself miraculously recovered her standing, and floundered to the other side of the road, amidst the execrations and screams of the bystanders; but her innocent babe was crushed to death by the ponderous wagon wheels, and was lifted up a pitiable object, and carried away by the police, who, securing the mother also, bore her off amidst her wild shrieks and powerful resistance, like an infuriated animal.

That scene was indelibly engraven on Minnie's memory. How fearful to her now seemed the beverage she had before considered so innocent. What but subtle poison could work such results as these? and what fearful results! From that night, as we have said, Minnie signed her secret pledge in the seclusion of her own heart, and it was yet unbroken.

In one thing, however, she was mistaken; for

though to her sorrow she observed that the glasses of both uncle and cousin were many times filled, they did not press her to take what she declined, but filled her glass with water as she requested ; and allowed her, for this time at least, her own will and pleasure in the matter, without seeking her reason for the preference. Perhaps had they guessed that reason, had they suspected that Minnie never took anything of an intoxicating character, they would not so easily have let her off. As it was, she got on very comfortably, enjoying her first meal in Australia very much, fully appreciating her glass of water.

CHAPTER III.

GLEN LEWIN.

"A Christian has a royal spirit, and need not be ashamed but unto One!"

"Among just men he walketh softly, but the world shall see him as a champion."

ANY one acquainted with our southern climate knows full well that there are days bright and balmy and spring-like, even in the very middle of our winter, when monthly roses put out their buds and blossoms, and seeds spring up in freshness, and bulbs push vigorously through the soil, and appear luxuriant in a few days, where all before seemed bare. Every one knows the cheerful influence of our winter sunshine, its warm, genial rays diffusing gladness and rejoicing in the heart and over the earth. The creeks, swollen by the rains that so plentifully deluge the ground, so recently wildly rushing and foaming in their madness, like miniature cataracts, now flow tranquilly through their green banks, meandering with a pleasant, rippling sound through thick beds of watercress, or tall reeds and rushes, or tea-tree bushes; almost making us believe that spring is already come, though experience warns us that it is winter still; that the sun will yet be shrouded in a canopy of dark, ominous clouds. That those clouds will yet burst forth with overwhelming force; that the creeks once more will

roar along their course, swelling and foaming even above their green banks; and that the spirit of the storm has not yet spent all its fury, but will again and again burst forth upon us.

Minnie Rayton had entered Australia during one of these lulls of the storm spirits, when nature was doing her best to smooth her ruffled features, and resume her placid beauty. It was as bright and lovely a winter's day as ever shone from a winter's sky, and though out of the sunshine there was a keenness in the air, rendering the warm cloth cloak and furs and thick carriage rug provided by the thoughtfulness of her aunt very acceptable, with that glowing sunshine it seemed almost a mockery to assume them. So recently from English snow and English frost, Minnie did not feel the cold, and was inclined to laugh at the precaution both uncle and cousin were taking against it.

"Wait a while, my young lady," said her uncle, laughing also, "wait till you have experienced something of our summer's heat, and then you will no longer term our winters warm. You will welcome a good fire and comfortable furs as much as any of us."

"Well, Minnie," said Harry, as they presently drove off, "I am determined to be the presenter of the first Australian-grown rose," and he took a half-opened bud from his buttonhole, and held it towards his cousin. "You see," he added, laughing, "We have roses here, though you English belie us, even in

that respect. I dare say you expected to find none here."

"You are right," said Minnie, accepting the bud with joyous surprise; "I thought at least I had left all *roses* behind me."

"What a libel! as if our fine climate could fail to produce whatever we choose to cultivate. You should see our Adelaide flower-shows, Minnie, and you *shall* some day; by jingo, you will not talk then of our dearth of flowers."

"Nor will she when she gets to Glen Lewin, Harry? Not at any rate after awhile. Why Minnie, child, we have more than fifty kinds of roses in our own domain, what other flowers there are you shall find out for yourself. You are fond of flowers, then?"

"I am indeed, uncle."

"Glad to hear it—right glad. You and your aunt will hit it to a tee; you will be a real blessing to her, Minnie," he added in a softened voice. "We never had but one daughter, and her we lost when a child. Aunt never forgets that loss; you must be her daughter now," and he brushed a tear from his eyes with the back of his hand as he spoke.

"She has reached a brighter, better, happier home, dear uncle," said Minnie, softly, pressing the hand that had been fondly placed upon her own.

"Yes—yes—I suppose so—maybe!" was the doubtful, doubting reply.

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven," said Minnie, in a gentle, yet firm voice.

Her uncle turned round with a curious smile to look into her face, her cousin did the same, but whatever they thought, their thoughts were unexpressed. Perhaps the firmness of the voice that uttered the words, tended much to produce the silence that followed. At any rate, Minnie was showing her colours, and at present no painful result had followed.

What a journey that was to Minnie, naive and fresh, it delighted her ever bright spirit, it kindled almost new life within her. It seemed indeed to her as if the whole current of her life had changed its course, as if she henceforth would be required to minister instead of being ministered unto. Her heart craved nothing better; it was the consummation of her desire, her hope, her delight. This new land—this strange, this unsophisticated land, would now be hers; she longed to identify herself with it, to help it forward, to work for its well-being and weal; she was intent on her *mission* yet, it was a bright day-dream of hers. What that mission would prove to be she had not yet discovered.

But while the bright fields and the green wheat and long-eared barley shooting upward, the hedgerows of mingled furze and kangaroo, and monthly-rose bushes, the primitive fences, some of them covered with grey moss, while others were in all the freshness of the red gum from which they had been recently split; the creeks, grassy and herbaceous to their very margin; the majestic gums with their sombre foliage, and young wattles just sprouting into

fresh leaf amid their yet unshed foliage, and springing into embryo blossoms; while these were things of joy to her heart, there was one sight that filled her with acute pain. Throughout this goodly land, where all wore so fair an aspect, where all seemed so fresh and lovely from the hand of its Creator, the serpent had left its trail. Wherever a group of houses had knitted themselves together, wherever human habitations of whatever kind were visible, wherever works of industry and wealth and well-being appeared, there also came the serpent's trail, and shed a deadly influence round. It swung on the road-side, in the shape of the publican's sign, luring men to destruction and misery, robbing tiny homesteads of their domestic happiness, making miserable wives and profligate children, quenching all household love, and chilling the very hearthstone.

All the sin and misery connected with the direful trail of that serpent was not left behind her in England. Over the ocean, 16,000 miles across, its trail travelled with its attendants—ruin and disgrace. The same scenes were to be enacted, the same sorrows to succeed, the same madness to exist in all its hideous forms. Minnie sickened at the thought—more reason had she soon to do so, for at every fresh “house of call” both uncle and cousin seemed to think it incumbent to stop, a usual practice with them, she soon discovered; for the host of each house appeared on intimate, even familiar terms with them, and at every fresh stay the crimson hue of her

uncle's face appeared to deepen, and his voice to grow more husky, while her cousin's random driving excited her fear for the safety of all. And yet—remembering that they had a lady with them—they were really on their best behaviour, and desirous of not exceeding.

As to Minnie, they took very quietly at first her refusal to take anything; attributing it, apparently, partly to her recent arrival in the colony; but at last, at the place they stopped to take a late dinner, when they found her refusal still positive, Harry could withhold his thoughts no longer, and exclaimed in surprise—

“Have you given the go-by entirely to wine? Is that it, cousin Minnie?”

“I never drink it, Harry, never; and hope I never shall.”

“Why not, pray? Surely, Minnie, you are not among those who see harm in a glass of wine?”

“I see harm in anything that leads to evil,” said Minnie, firmly.

“And how would your taking a glass of wine lead to evil, may I ask?”

In more ways than one, cousin Harry,” said Minnie, glancing playfully up at him, and thus disarming his anger at her reply. “In the first place, I sin by *example*. My partaking of a solitary glass would countenance your taking three or four, or even more; and,” she added in a low, beseeching tone, “Harry, how can you do it?”

He laughed, and withdrew to the window; he was not quite ready for ~~that~~ question.

"And so you have determined to run a crusade against all intoxicating drinks and their drinkers, eh?" he presently asked in a slightly sarcastic tone.

"As far as lies within my power I have," was Minnie's answer; and her heart throbbed within her at the thought. Was this the mission that indeed lay before her? Even so, let it be; in no strength of her own would she take it up. She had higher strength to look to.

"I am afraid, Minnie, you will not like Glen Lewin after all," said Harry rather sadly. "We are all reprobates there—all excepting mother—reprobates, at least in your eyes, if you regard so seriously the liking of *wine*, or any other drink. I wish I could overcome your scruples, and induce you to try this one glass; it is really fine."

Minnie put it gently back with her hand, and asked in a low tone, "Harry, did you ever see a woman intoxicated?"

"Pho—yes. Why did you ask? I have no fear for you."

"Were you not sickened at the sight?"

"Of course; there is nothing so disgusting. What then?"

"I have—*once*, and only once; but that *one* scene I shall never forget. I have never tasted wine or beer or intoxicating mixtures of any kind since."

"You are then, I suppose, one of those temperance

advocates?" said Harry, sullenly, "a cold-water drinker, eh? When did you sign the pledge?"

"I have signed no pledge yet, but gladly would I do it, if by doing so I could only induce one inclined to err to do the same," replied Minnie, sadly. "O Harry, if an intoxicated woman is a disgusting sight, why should it not also be so with a man?"

"We expect and look for feminine actions from women," said Harry, gravely, and he said no more; but Minnie was comforted when she found, that though he spoke coldly to her the rest of the journey, he kept himself within bounds, and persuaded his father to do so too, by simply urging the lateness of the hour, and the increasing badness and irregularity of the roads.

With the closing in of evening, a pale moon arose, casting dim shadows around. It was only a slight crescent, and lasted but a little while, soon setting in the horizon, and leaving only in its wake a multitude of twinkling stars to sparkle and bestow some light upon the travellers. Minnie had reason, indeed, to congratulate herself that she had not shunned the duty that so obviously had lain before her; that she had not timidly yielded to entreaty so fervent, to show her cousin his failings; for a rough journey, and a dark, still lay before them ere Glen Lewin and its welcome lights should appear. She was very, very tired, and even cold; and wrapping herself in the hitherto despised cloak and furs, with the comfortable rug spread on her knees, and tucked carefully

round her feet by her now considerably sobered uncle, she committed herself and companions into the guardianship of One who hears in every season of trouble, and then quietly waited the result.

Harry was an experienced driver, and a careful one when in possession of all his senses. He drove well now, though the road was scarcely visible.

"The horses know the way; you need not fear, Minnie," he said once. "They are familiar with every stick and stump, and will take care to escape them." And so indeed it seemed, for with comparatively few joltings, the sagacious animals plodded their way, till lights in the distance, and the distant bark of dogs proclaimed their approach to inhabited land once more.

"Glen Lewin for ever!" exclaimed Harry, springing down from his seat, and throwing up some large gates, which Minnie was scarcely able to discern in the murky light.

"Are we really home?" she asked in pleasant tones.

"Yes," said her uncle, taking the reins and driving through; "this is home, my dear. Welcome to it."

"So say I," said Harry, clanging the gates behind him, and springing to his seat again. "Welcome to Glen Lewin and to all that it contains—wine and all," he added, in a mischievous whisper.

"To do with it as I like?" asked Minnie archly.

"No, no, you gipsy; what you would like to do with it would not just suit. I suppose you would flood the cellar."

The carriage stopped once more, and the large hall door was flung wide open, letting a perfect stream of light pour over a broad verandah and handsome flight of steps. Dazzled by the light, bewildered, and very weary, Minnie was almost carried into the house, hurried through the hall, and ushered into a comfortably furnished room, redolent with cheerful, ruddy firelight, and soft lamplight. Her hands were warmly shaken, both of them, and she was taken at last into a very loving embrace by soft feminine arms, before she could well remember where she was, or that she had really reached home—her home for the future.

The great clock in the hall struck two before she sought her pillow. For a little while she was too weary to sleep. The incessant rocking motion of the ship was with her; the whirr, whirr of all she had seen since, attended her still, and amidst all, the discovery of her mission. Sleep at last came to her aid, uniting gradually all thoughts into one, till even that died out, and with a prayer upon her lips and in her heart, she slept.

CHAPTER IV.

FAMILY GREETINGS.

THE great hall clock was sonorously striking seven when Minnie, aroused from her dreams, sat up in bed to look around her. Everything yet seemed dream-like. She could scarcely realize that she was really once more on land, and that that land was sixteen thousand miles away from the place of her birth. The lines had certainly fallen to her in pleasant places, she could not help acknowledging as she noticed how amply, almost luxuriously provided she was with everything that could minister to her comfort in that pretty chamber—her own for the future—for so her aunt had told her on the previous night.

It had been Minnie's lot to be early acquainted with trial—to know the privations following a scanty purse, and the struggling that naturally attends a sensitive nature to conceal the lack. Worse than that,—for that was bearable while she had her parents with her to help her to endure,—she had been cast on the kindness of strangers, had known the bitterness of dependence. That was over now. She was welcomed to a home, and in her secret heart she resolved to make her uncle and aunt find her as necessary to their comfort and happiness as they were already to hers.

Minnie felt brave and strong. As though she had now an object in living, that she should not long be a waif on the world's wilderness, but one of its busy inhabitants; she had found her niche in that world, and how willingly she sprang to occupy it. To be of use to her fellows, to minister to their happiness, to point to the living fountain, and winningly to lead away from the path of sin and error and ruin: this was what she trusted lay before her, and she did not flinch, for she worked beyond her own strength, and was satisfied.

Leaving her room at length, Minnie stood in the hall she had crossed the night before, and took a survey. It was long, broad, and lofty, three as excellent points in the construction of an Australian dwelling as could well be desired. At either end the doors were fitted by stained glass windows instead of panels; and through the back door came a stream of sunlight, sending rich stains of purple and crimson and orange over the marble floorcloth. Neat hall chairs, one or two buffets, a barometer and thermometer, and the large and handsome clock aforesaid, formed the whole of the furniture. Many doors opened out of this hall on either side, while a back passage leading from it evidently conveyed to back premises. On the soft, silky mat before one of these doors, a large Newfoundland dog was lying, and as that seemed to indicate that the room was an inhabited one, Minnie at once turned towards it, and patting the friendly animal caressingly on its massive

head, she softly pushed open the door and entered. What a pleasant room, all the more cheerful for the morning sun streaming freely through the large, light windows, with their crimson drapery, and for the ruddy glow of a glorious fire on the bright hearth, that sent its influence over the breakfast-table, that stood handsomely appointed with breakfast luxuries at no great distance from it. A soft carpet, the prevailing hue of which was crimson, a thick rug before the hearth, on which the huge form of a tiger *couchant* was depicted, luxurious easy chairs, and all that comfort could require or wealth procure, gave ample assurance that there was no deficiency of the latter in her uncle's household. She knew this before; at least, something of it. She had felt sure that her uncle must be well off, by the ample provision he had made for her own outfit and passage, but she had not dreamed of finding in the far-off Australia—that land of wild natives and uncultivated Englishmen—anything like the home she found awaiting her. It was very pleasant, very, for Minnie had an innate love for everything orderly and beautiful; and though she would have contentedly welcomed unplastered walls, and unpolished furniture—in truth, she had expected little better—had she found her uncle and aunt thus domiciled, she was far better pleased with the contrast to her expectations.

Was the room unoccupied, then? Not quite. One of the easy chairs had an inmate; but she did not discover it, nor was her entrance observed, till she

drew near the fire: and then a low spoken "Auntie," aroused the reader; whose warm kiss, and embrace, and kind smile of welcome were very sweet indeed as a reception.

"Do not let me disturb you, dear auntie," said Minnie, after the first mutual inquiries were passed, "Do go on with your reading—and I will read too." And to that effect she subsided into another lounging chair, and took up an Adelaide newspaper, ostensibly to read, but in reality, over the top of the paper she was observing the kind and gentle face, now again leant over the page of her book, directly opposite to her.

Mrs. Rayton was a little woman, slenderly and delicately made, with soft blue eyes and fair hair, yet untouched by grey, in soft little ringlets on either side her face, stealing out from the black lace of a very pretty cap, round which a slender spray of "forget-me-nots" had entwined itself, or been entwined by the fingers of a very skilful milliner. Something about the expression of the eye, something round the sweet mouth, something written in the lines upon the brow, betrayed to Minnie a secret tale of hidden care and sorrow. It reminded her that outward beauty or wealth are insufficient alone to produce happiness—that even the rose has its thorn.

What a pleasant task it would be to while away those cares, and in return for all the love in those soft blue eyes, to render her path more smooth and pleasant! How delightful to stand in the place of

the lost daughter, to make the still mourning mother feel that there was one now to share in her cares and pleasures, and yield her cheerful companionship, as neither husband or son had it in their power to do. Was not the book she was reading the Bible? Yes, indeed it was. And Minnie's heart beat hopefully, that in this they would be united too.

But voices sounded below the window, and laughter and masculine footsteps; and then her aunt arose, quietly putting aside her book, and restoring the eye-glass she used, to its place, and looking fondly at Minnie, and laying a delicate little hand upon her arm, exclaimed,—

"Minnie, my dear, you must want your breakfast very much; you took nothing last night. Papa and the boys are late this morning."

"Not very, mamma," exclaimed the rollicking voice of Mr. Rayton, who entered the house just in time to hear the last word. "Only just eight by my watch, and that's Adelaide time." And in confirmation of the same, the eight-day clock in the hall trolled forth eight sonorous strokes.

"Well, Minnie, my child, up already after all your fatigue? and as bright as a spring morning. That's right, my girl; you've got some grit in you; worth a dozen of your wishy-washy boarding-school ladies." And taking both hands, he held her a little away from him for a moment, giving her a pleased survey; then drawing her closely to him, surprised her by a hearty kiss; and with gentle force replaced her in the chair

from which she had risen. She was glad to see her uncle. She liked his hearty manner. She could have laughed at his droll expressions too, and would have by no means shrunk from his kiss, but for one thing, and that depressed her greatly,—his breath, even at that early hour of the morning, was redolent with the fumes of brandy.

And was it not this that brought the look of care and sadness into her aunt's blue eyes? Was it not this that was at the root of all her mourning? Minnie no longer doubted it, nor doubted her mission either.

It was, however, the breakfast hour, and there was a general mustering. A neat, trim little maid brought in the tea-urn, hissing and bubbling, to the table. She was followed almost immediately by the "boys," as Mrs. Rayton called her sons: three tall young men, who all greeted Minnie as their cousin. She had seen but one of them, Harry, the charioteer, of the previous day. The other two were either absent from the house on her arrival, or had retired to rest. She thought the latter. She had excellent opportunity for a quiet scrutiny of each during breakfast.

Not much alike, brothers though they were; that was Minnie's verdict, with her first upward glance. Harry was dark, very dark, she thought him; for the tan of a southern sky had left its impress on his cheek and brow visibly enough for Minnie's English eyes to take note of. A fine brow he had,

and fine eyes and hair. He was not handsome, certainly. The Raytons were not remarkable for their personal beauty; but that was nothing, for he was presentable enough, and had a fine, well developed, manly figure, and but for that certain cast of dissipation that the constant imbibition of intoxicating drinks, even though they be not habitually taken to excess, imparts, there would have been something very attractive in his *tout ensemble*. Alas! in Minnie's estimation that spoilt all.

He was not the eldest, as she had imagined, but the second son. His elder brother was seated opposite to her, and was a complete contrast both in form and feature. In the first place, he was not so tall by some inches, but decidedly better looking. The colour of his hair, his eyes, and stature, were all from his mother's side of the house, and there was a little of her own sweetness on lip and brow. So Minnie thought. He was very silent,—politely attentive to his cousin, but very silent,—speaking as few words as possible, and leaving the conversational portion of the entertainment to the care of his father and two brothers, who were by no means behind-hand in their appreciation of the privilege. Minnie scarcely knew what to think of him. That he was reserved she could readily discern; but whether that reserve would after a time melt away, and the more genial part of his character appear; or whether reserve was habitual to him, she had yet to discover. She left that question to be solved by time. His

father and brothers called him Ned; his mother, Edwin, and she softly dwelt on the name, as though she loved it, whenever she had occasion to use it.

As to the youngest, John, or Johnny, as he was sometimes called, without being like either brother, he united a share of each. He was but seventeen, his mother said, and yet he was quite as tall and nearly as athletic as Harry, bidding fair some day to be of a more massive build. He was neither dark or fair, but between the two. His sunny, chestnut-brown hair curled up from his forehead, and lay in a nest of curls all over his head. He had tried all sorts of expedients to make that head of curls straight, but to little purpose; all he did to it, he gravely assured his cousin, only tended to make it curl the more exasperatingly, and so latterly he had given up in despair, and yielded it its own sweet way. There was something frank and open in the countenance of this her youngest cousin, and on the whole it was most pleasing to Minnie. She thought she could read it best.

Whether the failing that so evidently possessed both Harry and his father was shared by the others, she was scarcely yet able to judge. She thought not, at any rate, not in the same degree; and very thankful she felt in the hope that it was so;—very thankful on her aunt's account, very thankful on her own.

That first breakfast on Australian shores, and in her Australian home, was very, very pleasant to her after all. Her uncle was hearty and cheerful, and

ready and willing to hear all about the *Falcon* and its passengers she had to relate. Her cousins volunteered all kinds of information respecting the country, its climate, and inhabitants, with which she was about to make acquaintance. Johnny especially was delighted to dwell on the horrors of the place, though he gravely assured her she would get used to them in time. The scorpions and centipedes that beset the walls, the huge tarantulas that hide in the curtains, to say nothing of the snakes that lay concealed behind every tuft of grass. Minnie pretended to look terrified, but in reality she quietly took it all in, and divided by three the sum total of her information; while he at the same time was chuckling to himself, and thinking how gullible these English girls are.

CHAPTER V.

THE RIDING LESSON.

"Men call you fair, and you do credit it,
For that yourself, you daily such do see ;
But the true fair—that is, the gentle wit,
And virtuous mind—is much more praised by me."

SPENSER.

It took some little time before Minnie became thoroughly acquainted with her new home ; but the more she saw of it, the better she liked it. It was thoroughly the home of all the family, and great care and expense, as well as taste, had been lavished upon it. Glen Lewin was an estate to be proud of ; its grounds were extensive, and all in an excellent state of culture ; fine fruit-trees, beautiful shrubs, and rare flowers met her view on every side. There were willows at the creek, that swept their graceful branches to the very water's edge ; and poplars round the outskirts of the domain and in front of the house, towering loftily towards heaven. Orange and lemon trees, laden with golden fruit, swept in a semicircle at the back of the house, and formed a grove, at the extreme end of which a fountain, flower-bordered, was continually playing, sending forth showers of sparkling drops ; choice flowers, that were only familiar to Minnie as hothouse varieties, here grew luxuriantly in open air, and magnificent creepers

draped the verandah, unknown to her either by name or sight.

Order was dominant everywhere. The out-door offices were in admirable keeping with the house and grounds, and were built in picturesque style, with pointed roofs and gable ends and archways. The fowl-house Minnie fell in love with at once, it was so pretty an erection; and the choice specimen of its feathered inhabitants, her aunt's especial care, delighted her exceedingly. Before the house, on a small grassy lawn, inclosed by a neat wire fence, a fine emu strutted in solitary grandeur, while two or three curious sheep of a rare breed kept up the tropical appearance of the whole.

It was in truth a pleasant home, without and within; and Minnie warmly appreciated it. Her uncle and aunt were very kind; her cousins friendly and fraternal, and in a very few days she became thoroughly domesticated. But there was one stain upon all this beauty,—one bar to all this social happiness,—one marring spirit dominant, that brought a cloud upon the sunshine, and sadness where all might have been joy. Upon Mr. Rayton, and upon Harry too, the trail of the serpent most visibly rested. Minnie had too many proofs of their inebriety,—too many evidences of the sadness their conduct brought to her aunt, to doubt the reason for that sadness. Edwin professed extreme disgust with the conduct of both father and brother. He drank but little himself, that Minnie discovered after a few days' residence

among them ; but she found out also, that he was quite as persistent in favour of moderation, and the folly, as he termed it, of total abstinence, as either her uncle or cousin Harry, who were ready enough to acknowledge the error of their ways, when suffering from the frightful headaches consequent on each excess. She had made hope of winning John to her side, after all, for he neither laughed and jeered at her refusal to take wine, as the others did, nor treated that refusal with quiet sarcasm, as was Edwin's practice. On the contrary, he applauded her steadfastness, rejoiced in her determination of purpose, and told his mother in confidence, that he considered Minnie, for an English girl, "a regular brick."

Plenty of laughter and ridicule she had to endure ; but Minnie could bear it very well, and sometimes turn the laughter back upon the laughers. Even Edwin's sarcasms she often successfully parried, to John's extreme delight. He rejoiced to draw on a contest between them, declaring he would back the little English girl to any amount, thereby provoking his brother to a greater extent than he cared to acknowledge. The mother sat by during these wordy contests, in fear and trembling ; glad, indeed, that Minnie had the boldness to confront the enemy that had destroyed her peace of mind, yet terrified at the temerity, that, in defence of the right, left consequences uncared for. Example speaks louder than precept, however, and by degrees, won over by Minnie's arguments, she gathered sufficient courage

to leave her own glass of wine untouched upon the table, just as it had been presented to her. Minnie quietly noted this, but made no remark. It was sufficiently pleasant to her that her mission had won its first success; that there was the benefit of another's example to tell on the household with its silent persuasion. Her aunt never mentioned the subject, but the untasted glass was very eloquent.

In the midst of these contests there came a sudden lull. Mr. Rayton and Harry one fine morning departed for the north, to one of their most distant sheep runs. Edwin soon after was summoned on urgent business to Adelaide, and Minnie found herself alone with her aunt, and with John for an occasional companion and attendant.

"Minnie," he exclaimed one morning soon after the others had departed, leaving him to do the agreeable—an office he was by no means loth to undertake; "Minnie, if you want to get about much, or see much in the country, you must positively learn to ride. Come, I will teach you, if you are willing to learn: that's a fair offer."

"I am quite willing and anxious, too, into the bargain," replied Minnie, looking up brightly from the hot scones she was buttering. I want above all things to be able to manage a horse, John; and shall be obliged beyond anything I can tell you, if you will have the patience to teach me. Remember, at the same time, if you please, that I have never ridden anything in my life but a quiet donkey."

"A donkey! well if you have mastered that most stubborn of animals, I shall believe you will manage a horse pretty quickly."

"Have you anything fit for Minnie to ride?" asked his mother anxiously.

"Yes, mother, the very thing: as pretty a little pony as a lady need wish to ride; a dark chestnut with a heavy mane and tail. Surely you remember Fanny?"

"Fanny! oh yes; she's a pretty creature; but, John, she's not broken in for a lady."

"Was not, my dear mother, but is," replied John, laughingly. "I have foreseen the want, and prepared accordingly. I suppose you never missed your riding skirt from the hook in your wardrobe?"

"My riding skirt!" exclaimed Mrs. Rayton in alarm, though she could scarcely contain her laughter. "What a boy you are! it must be all rents and tatters now."

"Nothing of the kind, mother, because," he added with a mischievous pause, "I did not take it. No; I just got Betty to give me an old skirt that nobody wears now; and Fanny and I have got on admirably. Now give me credit for forethought, Minnie; am I not everything admirable?"

"I give you credit for everything thoughtful and kind," said Minnie warmly. "I have been so longing for a ride. You have conferred a heavy favour on me; I don't know how I shall ever discharge it."

"Oh, as to that never fear; I shall come upon you

some day for payment, depend upon that," said John gaily; "and meanwhile butter a hot scone, there's a good girl; I hate the least trouble, as you must have found out by this time."

"Certainly," laughed Minnie, as she took one of the most presentable from the fire, and placed it, nicely buttered, on his plate.

"Where is Fanny now?" asked Mrs. Rayton a few minutes after, during which the breakfast alone had been discussed.

"In the stable, mother. I intended to speak to Minnie to-day; and being pretty confident of her answer, took care the pony should be ready. Will you ride to-day?"

"No, my dear; not to-day. I have business at home."

"Besides, you forget I am only a learner," said Minnie archly. "I shall try your patience enough, without taxing aunt."

"Ah, to be sure; something in that," said John, with affected gravity. "Well now," he added, rising and pushing back his chair, "I'm off to the stables. Borrow mother's habit and have it on by the time I come back, Minnie. I give you half an hour."

Possessed of the habit her aunt most willingly placed at her service, Minnie ran off with quick footsteps, and light heart to her room. She was prepared to enjoy her lesson, for it was just the very thing she wanted, and she was fully determined not to let little difficulties daunt her. She was not in

the least afraid; it was not her wont to fear. She thought it very possible she would be both awkward and ungraceful at the first, and expected John's teasing laugh as a reward. But that she did not mind. She was resolved to do credit to her young master, to learn as quickly as possible, and then to take as many rides round the neighbourhood, and to see as much of the surrounding scenery as he would take the trouble to show her. After that, the reins well in her hands, she would feel free to go or to come, ready for all emergencies, ready to find out all the means of doing good she so earnestly desired.

John had no conception of half the drift of his cousin's mind, he little comprehended the real cause of her delight at his proposition. She did not enlighten him. Better, she thought, to let the truth gradually dawn; though even had she allowed her chief motive to appear, there is little doubt that he would have applauded her for her "pluck," and offered his unqualified assistance whenever it was required.

Minnie was ready, and waiting in the verandah some moments before her cousin made his appearance, and very pretty and graceful she looked in the heavy cloth habit, with her own little black hat and veil, beneath which the dark thick braids of hair were disposed.

"Now for the ride, Minnie!" exclaimed John, riding up, with the pony ready saddled at his side. "I see you're a girl of spirit, and don't keep a fellow waiting. I'm glad of it; for if anything provokes a

man's temper, it's waiting while a woman sticks in her pins."

Minnie and her aunt exchanged laughing glances, and the former, going forward, was presently in the saddle, receiving minute instructions as to the management of reins and whip.

"Show her the whip; don't use it much," said John vaulting to his own seat.

"Don't tire your cousin, John," were his mother's parting words as they rode off.

"Perhaps I shall tire him first, aunt," said Minnie. "I will go slowly at first, till I get accustomed to the paces, if you please, John."

"By all means. A walk, then a canter; we will walk till we get outside the gates. How do you like her, Minnie?"

"Very much; she is a dear little thing."

"Gentle and easy as a glove," said John. "Just what you want; for you see sometimes we are all away, and mother's busy, and then if you had no horse you could safely ride you would be in a fix. But there's no fear of Fanny; she was no trouble to break in."

The large gates passed, and fairly closed behind them, and Minnie by this time somewhat acquainted with the paces, and the power over bit and rein, was ready for the promised canter.

"Now, Minnie, keep a firm hand on your rein; make her conscious of your power. The road is level as a die for the next mile. Are you ready?"

"Quite," was Minnie's answer, as she turned a flash of merriment upon her cousin, and off they sprang, gracefully and easily; the fresh breeze blowing back Minnie's veil, and sending the crimson to her cheek. The first canter was excellently managed.

"So!" John exclaimed, as they again subsided to a walk: "I knew you could do it from the first." He continued, "I am positive of it. You are just the right figure, and just the right spirit, too; you have not a particle of fear, that's another thing, and the creature knows it. Minnie, you'll make a superb horsewoman, and I'm proud to have the pleasure of teaching you."

That first ride was a very pleasant one. The weather was delightful still, bright and warm in the sunshine, and blue overhead, with a few flaky clouds here and there that lay in snow-wreaths among the azure. The grass below the feet was green enough, and wild flowers were already making themselves visible. Here and there the scarlet creeper was peeping forth from some huge stone or rocky fragment. Flocks of green parrots made the trees vocal with their shrill, incessant chirping; while cockatoos in any number winged their flight overhead, and with their discordant shrieking went on their way. Minnie came home delighted with her ride, delighted with all she had seen, delighted with the pony, on the best possible terms with her cousin, and with the first spray of golden wattle she had ever seen adorning her jacket front.

CHAPTER VI.

COUSIN JOHN ON TEMPERANCE.

"Yield but a step, the foe at once will rise
And turn thee to distraction with his wiles.
Ah! shun that one false step!"

THE clouds that had floated like snow-wreaths over the blue of heaven on the previous day, gathered blackness the next, and Minnie rose in the morning with the pleasant expectation of another trial of Fanny's powers completely dissipated by the sound of heavily falling rain drops, and a loud moaning wind, that vainly roamed round the house seeking inlet and finding none. In fact, one of those heavy, unceasing rains rapidly following on the premature spring days so peculiar to Australia, was really deluging the garden, and hanging in dense mists over the distant hills. It was the first heavy rain Minnie had seen since her sojourn in Australia, and certainly the first boisterous efforts of Boreas that had shaken doors and windows, of even the substantially built Glen Lewin mansion. For the first time she felt both dispirited and cold, and crept rather than ran to the breakfast room where her aunt and cousin were already waiting. Its pleasant aspect and bright, joyous fire did much to raise her spirits; but it was with a mischievous gleam in his eye that John exclaimed,—

"Well, Minnie, here's a beautiful rain; is not this delightful?"

"Delightful, do you call it?" said Minnie, shivering. "Well, I suppose it is natural to me, but rainy weather always depresses me."

"Winter is our rainy season," smiled her aunt.

"Yes, aunty, I know; and that is why I was so pleasantly surprised by the fine, warm weather. What a hurricane! Are these storms ever serious?"

"Not often—sometimes, of course," responded John. "But I should have thought, after all your experience of the sea and its winds and waves, this land-storm would seem very insignificant. We shall probably have a few gums prostrate if the wind continues. I don't anticipate any further damage. However," he continued, laughing, "I shall be able to tell you all the news when I return this evening."

"Are you going out in such weather as this?" exclaimed Minnie.

"Yes, certainly; if I did not, our mail-bag would be likely to remain empty," said John.

A very heavy rain fell all the morning, but towards evening it ceased. The dark clouds that veiled the sun slowly rolled up from the heavens, and a gleam of bright sunshine sparkled on the tops of the trees still glistening with the drops of rain. Minnie had been very busy all day with her needle, still busier with her thoughts. Seated by the fire in the cheerful morning-room, she had almost ceased to remember the rain, or to note the wind, except when an

extra gust swept round the house, and tried a forcible entrance at the windows. Her thoughts were far away, and of the past; particularly the last two days spent on board the *Falcon*. She was thinking of Dr. Leigh's words—"Every woman has a mission;" and of his assurance that she would soon find out what *hers* was, and that he should see her engaged in it. Would it indeed be really so? Very possibly; but at present her plans were all indistinct. The crusade she intended to engage in was not thoroughly organised. She had become acquainted with no one outside the large gates of Glen Lewin. Her work appeared to be limited to her uncle's household. Well, if by the blessing of God she was able to accomplish good here, would it not be worth living and working for? Minnie felt that indeed it would.

Backwards and forwards her needle flew, and with every stitch was woven a thought, sad thoughts now, for they were recollections of the journey from Adelaide; of the free libations of both uncle and cousin, and their consequent reckless actions. Surely, if while in their presence almost a stranger to them, they thus committed themselves, what would it be when the strangeness wore off, when the feeling of restraint was quite gone? She scarcely dared permit herself to think.

One thing she remembered with pleasure and with hope, for it certainly warranted encouragement for the future. Displeased though Harry had seemed at her words, they had carried an influence with them,

causing him not only to abstain himself for the time being, but to induce his father to do the same; and no matter what the pretext, it took effect.

"Slowly and softly, but very surely, the trickling streamlet wins its way through the hardest stone," thought Minnie. "And there are harder hearts than Harry's to be conquered. How glorious would it be to win him to my side as an advocate for temperance. There is a good deal in him, he has plenty of life and spirits, and why should all be lost in the wine cup? Minnie bent over her work, and an especial prayer went up from her heart for her cousin Harry, that he might not only have will and resolution, but strength to dash away the poisoned draught that was luring him to destruction; that a new heart might also be given him, that he might be found sitting at the feet of Jesus in his right mind.

Our prayers do not always meet an immediate answer; this is the daily experience of the Christian. We have to pray, and pray again and again, even till our hearts fail us, before the blessing comes; yet we are still to pray. The answer will come; if it tarry, we are encouraged to wait for it.

Poor Minnie! could she at that moment have beheld the cousin for whom she was so earnestly praying, the hopeful flush would have passed from her cheek, the bright glance from her eye; for a poor, miserable object she would have beheld, stretched upon the bed in one of the shepherd's huts, in all the misery of headache and repentance. Little like the temperance

advocate she had so hopefully pictured in the future looked poor Harry Rayton at that moment; and though he was enduring the agonies of remorse, it was the remorse that so constantly followed a night of excess, and fading away with the feelings that induced it, was but of little moment. In the strong language of scripture, "The dog returned to his vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Happily this picture of her poor delinquent cousin was invisible to the eye of our sanguine Minnie.

A stray sunbeam suddenly came upon the sew-beam that held the work, and down went both needle and work together, while their owner sprang gaily up to the window, just as her aunt entered the room.

"Fine again, aunt! Oh, I'm so glad! I do believe all the rain is passing off again. Do look what a beautiful sunset,—and the evening star, in that clear, cloudless bit of sky. Is it not lovely?"

"You will get another riding lesson to-morrow," said her aunt, smiling.

"Yes; that will be glorious! Why I did not even know that it had ceased raining. And now all those dark clouds have rolled away *en masse*!"

"Come out with me, and gather oranges; it do you good after being in-doors all day; there will be just time before tea."

"Ah, auntie," cried Minnie, as she stood with a basket of the golden fruit on her arm, prettily packed among their green leaves, and another luscious

specimen in her hand, which she seemed highly to appreciate. "Ah, auntie, this is preferable to all classes of fermented juice. Give me the juice from the fruit itself, whether it be orange or grape."

"I wish you could teach Harry that lesson," said Mrs. Rayton with a sigh, a sigh for more than Harry—but she only sighed, and said no more.

Curtains closely drawn, a ruddy, carefully swept hearth, soft lamplight, and a very cheerful tea-table, was John Rayton's mental vision, as he came into the precincts of home, after a cold dark ride from Clinton. Visions too, of his lady mother, leaning back in her large chair; of his cousin Minnie, her soft dark eyes bright with a welcome for him, did not render that mental scene less pleasant. A few moments, and all was realized, even to position, though on his entrance the positions were instantly changed. His mother arose, and approached her tea-table, while Minnie sprang up and confronted him.

"Any letter for me, John?"

"Too soon, yet Minnie; no English mail in. No letters for any one but father this time. Post ain't prolific; can't help it; don't blame me." And he threw his leather mail-bag with a comical grimace upon the sideboard, and drew up to the table.

It is so natural to look for letters from the post, so natural even that feeling of disappointment when none falls to our share, that Minnie could not help experiencing it, leaving at the same time all probability on one side, though she laughed at herself the next moment.

"No letters, at present," said John, looking up mischievously from the tea he was enjoyably discussing. "None as yet; no knowing what there may be. When gentlemen make such earnest enquiries after young ladies, as some one did of me to-day, why, I suppose we may look for something to follow."

"Nonsense, John. What do you mean?" said Minnie, laughing, though the bright blood mounted to her very temples.

"Exactly what I say, my dear. Very particular enquiries were made of me to-day, after the health and wellbeing of a certain young lady called Miss Minnie Rayton, by a gentleman who introduced himself to me for that purpose."

"A gentleman? Who and what was he like?"

"Like? Like,—a gentleman," said John, with pretended hesitation. "Really, Minnie, I'm not good at description."

"There is only one person who can know me at Clinton (that is, if he has arrived)," said Minnie slowly "and that is Doctor Leigh."

"You've hit it, Minnie. Doctor Leigh is the man; just arrived this week. I had the pleasure of taking a nobbler with him."

"A *what*?"

"A *nobbler*, my green little cousin. That is—but perhaps it would be better for all three of us you remain verdant on that subject: the less said about it the better," said John laughing, continuing his tea.

"I think so too," said his mother gravely.

"But I do not wish to remain verdant on any subject," said Minnie earnestly, "particularly on this; and I am afraid that though I do not know what kind of drink a nobbler is, that it is an intoxicating drink of some kind."

John threw down his knife and fork, and shouted with laughter. In vain his mother expostulated; in vain Minnie looked vexed; peal after peal rose successively, till fairly exhausted, he leant back in his chair, exclaiming feebly, "Minnie you'll be the death of me! I can't stand it, I can't."

"What have I said to make you laugh?" asked Minnie with raised eyebrows. "What *is* a nobbler, then; is it not a drink?"

"Of course it is," said John exploding again. "*Aqua pura*, my dear; *aqua pura*."

"I am to understand, then, that you and Doctor Leigh took a glass of water together," said Minnie half sarcastically. "The doctor was not wont to be so abstemious," she continued.

"I should *rather* think not. Cold water on such a day as this has been! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What *is* a nobbler, then?" repeated Minnie, as nearly offended as she could be.

But her aunt interposed here, and gave her the needful information, that a nobbler was really a measure, about half a wine-glass, of any liquor; but in this case, as generally where a nobbler alone was the want specified, brandy was the liquor intended.

"Neat brandy?"

"Yes," said her aunt, sadly. She had known too sensibly the evil of these nobblers, to speak otherwise than sadly on the subject.

"Oh, John!" exclaimed Minnie, gravely; "and I have thought all manner of good things of you. I had no idea you were an imbiber of neat brandy."

"Neither am I, as a rule," said John, calmly; "this is an exception. Such a raw, wet day: what would you give a fellow to keep out the cold? What, in fact, can be better than brandy?"

"And you did not stop at *one* nobbler," said Minnie, sadly, as though she had been really conscious of the fact.

"How do you know?" said John, half angrily, springing up, and quitting the table. "I am not the *worse* for it, at any rate," he continued, kicking the fire together with the toe of his boot.

"The *worse*? I hope you never have been—never will be that; but you *will*, mark my words, you will. To-day your nobbler became two, perhaps three, and it will go on increasing, if you allow it to do so. The desire will grow into an appetite; I'm sure of it, John. And I have felt so confident in you!" she added reproachfully.

"What do you say of Doctor Leigh, then?" muttered her cousin, half sullenly. "He was as bad."

"Worse," said Minnie, "for he is older. Why I am disappointed in him," she continued sadly.

"Oh, nonsense, botheration, nonsense! He's a

fine fellow, whatever you say. I go in for Dr. Leigh, and think Clinton has an acquisition in him."

"If he continues as sober as he was on board the *Falcon*, it has," said Minnie in a low voice; "but *drink* will sully the most brilliant talents, John. I would not give anything for all Doctor Leigh's abilities and skill (and he possesses both in a high degree) if he suffers the wine cup, or lower yet, the nobbler, to sway his future course."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TOWNSHIP OF CLINTON.

"All lovely was the blossom, fresh and fair,
And yet a cruel blight was lingering there."

A SUCCESSION of fine days followed that of wind and rain, and Minnie had good opportunity of making acquaintance, not only with her pretty pony, but also with the neighbourhood round Glen Lewin, and once she accompanied her cousin as far as Clinton, for John was nothing loth to exhibit his fair companion, and she was nothing loth to extend her rides as far as he chose to direct them. She certainly expected—we had nearly said hoped—to have seen one familiar face at Clinton, but she did not; for wherever that face was, it never appeared within range of her vision while she remained in the pretty township.

And whatever our fair readers may think to the contrary, that ride to Clinton was a very pleasant ride to Minnie; it gave her a view of Australia in a new light, a light she enjoyed very much, for it *was* fresh and new; it had a character of its own, and a character she liked. No set streets of shops in Clinton; the stores, and they were several of different descriptions, had grown up, each apparently at its own sweet will, and just where it seemed most eligible at the moment of building. The houses

scattered thickly here and there between these stores, had followed the same laudable example. All kinds of architecture were visible here, quaint enough, original in the extreme, but characteristic of the taste and views of the erector. Some in their extreme modesty had turned their fronts away from the public road, humbly exhibiting their backs to the passers-by. Others sat jauntily on one side, caring only for a front view of some glorious hills that were wont to be flooded at eventide with rosy beauty, and perfectly indifferent to the uniformity of Clinton. Here were massive stone pillars, supporting a frail fabric, in shape of a verandah of shingle; here, a thick stone wall, securely surrounding a garden with a little wooden structure of dwarfish dimensions as a centre. Up and down among these were square, four-roomed dwellings of undressed brick or stone, looking boldly forward on the traffic, and turning their fronts determinedly to the highways of life. And there was also a sprinkling of those really pretty dwellings that bear an impress outside of what they contain within; where beauty of effect had really been studied; these dwellings reposed in flower-gardens with graceful drapery of curling tendril and star-like blossoms as an adornment, and soft foliage to throw a graceful shade and produce all the charms of retirement. These were some of Clinton's rare spots of loveliness.

But whenever was there a township erected that had not the presence of that lurer to destruction, the

public-house? As she rode through Clinton, Minnie sorrowfully counted three, and turning to her cousin, exclaimed, "Can Clinton really support three public-houses?"

"Clinton does its full share, Minnie," he replied, laughing at her distressed face; "but the neighbourhood round is populous, and the traffic through extensive; so all the sin of supporting these houses does not rest with township itself."

"And are the people of Clinton really so mad as to cherish their ruin?"

John laughed. "Call it so if you will," he said; "certainly these are not the most sober lot to be found in this neighbourhood, I can tell you, Minnie," he added. "It wants a little strength of mind for a fellow to resist the temptation to drink that assails one in a township like this. One meets every other minute with an acquaintance. The first word after a shake of the hand, in many cases, comes instantly, 'What will you take?' and *one glass, one nobbler,*" he added, with a comical glance at his cousin, "leads to more. A fellow, too, is expected to 'stand treat,' or be accounted mean and despicable. You women know nothing of the temptations to drink to which we men are exposed. I don't wonder at Harry—not I! His nature's yielding, and he's a sociable fellow, generally liked; there's an excuse for such as he is getting 'bagged' sometimes. And father, he's of a convivial turn; why, they would not be likely to let him go unscathed—and these things grow on a fellow. It's different with me and different with Ned."

"Why should it be different?"

"Why?—well, take myself as an example. You see, I happen to have an enormous bump of firmness," and he uncovered his curly head, and laughingly pointed out the elevated organ as he spoke, for they were riding home under a soft glowing sunset, and had left Clinton behind them.

"Your firmness might err on the wrong side," suggested Minnie.

"It don't, however. I have no love for drink, and was never the worse for it in my life."

"You are so young, John."

"Plenty younger than myself drink disgustingly," said John. "That's not it—besides, I look far older than I am—you know that, Minnie. No, that's not it: I have the power, and the will too, to say *No* when I choose. The fellows are beginning to understand that," he added, with a covert smile.

"You had the *power* but not the *will* to say *No* the other day, John, when you drank with Dr. Leigh," said Minnie, bending to gather her fallen reins as she spoke.

"Ah," laughed John, "does the shoe pinch there. I say, Minnie, is Dr. Leigh a very particular friend of yours?"

"No," said Minnie, slightly colouring; "but I am very sorry to hear of any one I have known falling into evil habits. A medical man of all others ought not to give way to such."

"Ha, ha!" laughed John. "When you have got beyond your greenness, my dear Minnie," he replied,

"when the 'new chum' is fairly out of your composition, you will find that those medical men who do not drink are decidedly in the minority; something to do, I suppose, with the disagreeable nature of the profession. At any rate, the others are the rule—these the exception."

"And was Dr. Leigh to prove the rule, or the exception?" thought Minnie, sadly. She could not endure that it should be the former. It seemed too terrible that all his talents should be concealed beneath such a bushel. She could scarcely believe it would ever happen. She *liked* Dr. Leigh—yes, fair, suspicious reader! *liked* is the word—and had very pleasant remembrances of his kindly attention throughout the long, dreary voyage; of many happy hours whiled away in cheerful, intelligent converse; of books read and criticised by both. Yes, she liked him very much, and as she said, it went bitterly against her that one she liked should tread the downward road, and what could Minnie do to prevent it? At present, nothing,—absolutely nothing. Perhaps there was nothing needed. Time would show.

The ride after that was rather a silent one, and John drew his own deductions from that—as, perhaps, many of our young lady readers are doing at the present time. The deductions were wrong, however, for Minnie's heart was in her mission; day and night her thoughts were upon that. She had no time to give to any other passion. Much less was Minnie one to bestow unsought favours. Dr. Leigh was

viewed with a perfectly platonic regard, and the subject of her thoughts during the remainder of that silent ride, was how she could successfully combat with a foe that was tainting all her friends with its poison.

Minnie was now becoming an expert horsewoman, on excellent terms with her pony, and amidst her other accomplishments insisted on learning both to saddle and bridle the gentle creature, to John's infinite amusement, though in a fit of boyish enthusiasm he pronounced her "a regular brick, the very girl for the bush." That lesson she learned to perfection in a short time.

"It will be so useful, John," she said, by way of excuse for the desire. "I might want to ride very badly indeed; and it is just possible that no one might be at home to saddle my pony. Now I am free."

"Perfectly independent; only don't make use of your independence by running away," was John's laughing reply.

"The Campbells are home again," said Mrs. Rayton, one evening as the trio sat down to tea. "Mrs. Matthews called here while you were out, and gave me the information. I suppose they will call in a day or two."

"I should say so," said John.

"Who are the Campbells?" asked Minnie. "Have I heard their names before?"

"Perhaps not; and yet I think you have," answered Mrs. Rayton, smiling. "Helen and Jessie we usually call them."

"Ah, yes; their names are familiar enough," replied Minnie. "Did I not hear the name of Helen in connection with Harry?"

"To be sure you did," laughed John. "Harry would very gladly take the fair Helen for a bride; but, alas! the fair Helen will not be taken."

"No!—why not?"

"She is a very particular young lady, somewhat like yourself, my dear Minnie. She has got certain crotchety ideas into her head which nobody can remove. She says, I believe, that she will not have a rival in the wine cup, and so poor Harry gets turned overboard."

"Do not you think she is right?" asked Minnie gravely. "Can you blame any woman for dreading such a rival. I shall like Helen Campbell, I am sure," she continued warmly. "I quite agree with her."

"Poor Harry! two against one; rather too bad, Minnie."

"Poor Harry! I think he would be rich in the love of such a girl, John; if he really loves her he will easily know how to decide. If he loves her less than intoxicating drink, surely she is happier without him."

"Yes," said her aunt, with a deep sigh; "and yet, Minnie, I believe if anything would reclaim Harry, it is the love of Helen Campbell. She possesses great influence over him already."

"They are two opposite characters," said John.

“Any one to look at their heads can tell that. Helen is firm to obstinacy, I was going to say ; at any rate, firmer than I admire in a woman. It takes away something of the softness of woman’s character ; a softness that to *me* seems like the delicate bloom upon the peach—half its beauty. As to Harry, he may be led by a hair either for right or wrong.”

“More reason why he should have a right leader,” said Minnie.

“So say I : but you see, Helen, though an admirable leader, will not be his. And yet I believe she likes him, and would do anything to reclaim him.”

“I feel quite interested in Helen Campbell,” said Minnie ; “I am quite anxious to see her. Is her sister at all like her ?”

“Not she : a wild little colt as ever broke a tether,” said John carelessly. “She is much younger—in fact, only fifteen ; and full of fun and life. Helen’s is still life—Jessie’s, life in action. Ah, never fear, you will see them often enough now. They live only three miles from here—Alex, Helen, and Jessie together. The girls keep house for their brother ; their parents are dead.”

“Is their brother as young as themselves ?” asked Minnie in surprise.

“Not he ; he is years in advance of them. Helen, indeed, is many years older than her sister ; and as to Alex, there are quite as many years between him and Helen. He is sober enough, and staid, and rich withal. Do not you think he might cut out Doctor

Leigh ? ” continued John teasingly. “ Think, Minnie, — *rich and sober !* ”

“ For shame, John ! ” exclaimed his mother, taking pity on Minnie. “ What nonsense the boy talks. Don’t mind him, Minnie. ”

Did she mind him ? Not much ; but she went to bed with the pleasant thought that she had an acquaintance to make, that those Campbells would prove fellow-workers in the future, and that the mission would go forward and *prosper*. How she prayed that it might do so ! how eagerly she searched her Bible for confirmation of her hopes ! and how encouraged she felt by the assurance she read in her evening chapter, “ *that those who wait upon the Lord shall not want any good thing* ” !

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAMPBELLS AND THEIR HOME.

“Tis home where the heart is, wherever that be.”

“I THINK, John,” exclaimed Mrs. Rayton, a morning or two later, “that since the Campbells have been from home, and have only just returned, it will be but kind of us to pay them a visit, and introduce them to Minnie. Can you go with us to-day?”

“Certainly, mother; with pleasure. Will you drive or ride?”

“Ride, I think; Minnie will enjoy it better, and I dare say a ride will do me no harm, it is such pleasant weather.”

It was indeed a day to quicken the pulse of both old and young; breeze enough was there to temper the heat of the sunbeams, and bear on its light wings the perfume of the wattle blossom, now golden bright; sun sufficient to warm the breeze, and render its influence very pleasant. It was the latter end of August now; the fruit-trees were budding, the almonds putting forth their delicate blossoms, and Minnie was in the full enjoyment of an Australian spring. As to the flowers, they were many of them in their full glory. Minnie and her aunt had ample employment now all day long; and Minnie enjoyed the pleasant consciousness that she was becoming neces-

sary to her aunt in more ways than one,—that the whole household was brighter for her presence. So it was.

“Her very fit has music in’t,” said the servants of Glen Lewin, as they watched her passing to and fro, bestowing her kindly “good morning,” or pleasant smile, or a few friendly words of sympathy and interest.

“It’s worth while staying at home once now and then,” thought John, as, book in hand, he indolently stretched his feet before the fire, listening to the marvel of sweet sounds that came floating to his ear from Minnie’s piano,—one her uncle had provided expressly for her. Very pleasant, too, he thought her companionship at all times, at home or abroad. He had often longed for a sister, and a cousin he found was a very excellent substitute.

Minnie was certainly an acquisition to Glen Lewin. Even old Sancho, the house-dog, seemed to acknowledge that, for he was on exceedingly friendly terms with her.

And so all the while, though Minnie herself could not discern it, and thought her mission slumbered, she was in the active performance of some very important preliminary parts of that mission, gently working her way into hearts, softening the ground for the future seed, winning her path to greater advantage. One part of woman’s mission, Doctor Leigh would have told her, she was most successfully engaged in, and a very lovable portion it was.

There were some of the household beyond the pale of her influence yet; of her uncle and two elder cousins she felt she had yet but little knowledge. The business that had called Harry and his father far north still held them there; and Edwin, John said, had gone south, having heard of some likely stock worth the trouble of a purchase. The latter was expected home soon.

"And then," said John, comically, "it will be my turn to run away; though, Minnie, after all the pleasant time at home it will be no joke to put up with the hard quarters of a shepherd's hut, even for a time. You'll have to take Ned for your cavalier too. Grave old Ned! But there, I shouldn't wonder that you'll make even him sociable. I don't know how you manage it."

The road to the Campbells lay to the right of Glen Lewin, and this Minnie had only partly traversed. It was not all level road, but ascending, skirted on both sides by trees, from the massive oak to the quaint honeysuckle or weird she-oak, cherry-tree, blackwood, and gold and silver wattle,—all went to make up a portion of the scenery. Beautiful views crowned these steep ascents: peeps of the distant hills and plains and scrub, of rocky ranges and smooth undulations, that did Minnie's heart good. It was not a long ride but a very lovely one, and it was over before she had any conception of it. The bay of house-dogs, those household guardians, indispensable in the country, first warned her of their

approach to habitable regions. Then some large gates, a little after the pattern of those at Glen Lewin, appeared in their path; but unlike Glen Lewin, whose mansion lay far back from the entrance gate, the Campbell homestead was just in sight, its friendly windows glaring in the sunlight a kindly welcome,—just such a one as they expected and received.

Minnie was a little disappointed with the appearance of the house; it did not quite meet with her approval. A long, low structure of stone, substantial enough, but without any pretension to the ornamental, stretched full in sight of the gates. A flight of rude steps led into as rude a verandah, and this verandah, finely and substantially built as it was, betrayed how far the useful prevailed over the ornamental at Campbell Dell; for heaped up in any number under its ample canopy, stood well-filled sacks of wheat crowding one upon another, for Alex Campbell was an agricultural as well as a sheep farmer.

But for the presence of a lordly gum that stood in massive grandeur near the gates, and of some half-dozen aloes that spread along the fence (themselves a formidable fence with their barbed leaves), and for two or three castor-oil trees that grew still closer to the house, the front of the Campbell Dell homestead would have looked bare indeed; as it was, these tropical specimens of vegetation did somewhat relieve the eye. There had been no effort to lay out any garden; what there was deserving that name lay at the back of the house, sloping down from the back

door to the borders of a creek. The background of trees looked pretty, but Minnie could not forgive the absence of flowers in the front, and resented very highly the presence of those bags of wheat.

Any amount of *un-comfort* and bareness within would not have surprised Minnie after such an outside. She began to picture Helen and Jessie Campdell in a very different light to that she had hitherto done. She said nothing to either aunt or cousin, though the latter was laughingly considering her countenance, and was perfectly cognizant of its utter feelings of disappointment and disgust.

"Rather colonial, is it not?" he exclaimed, as he assisted her from her saddle.

"Yes, if colonial stands for rough," replied Minnie. She had no time to say more, for the house-door opened, and a servant appeared, who in a broad Scotch accent invited them to "Come ben;" the young ladies were out in the garden, near the creek, she told them. But they followed her first into a large, square hall, bare and unfurnished as the outside, and thence into a really pretty sitting-room, that after all the bareness, came upon Minnie like a pleasant surprise. That it was the sitting-room was easily seen, for there were traces on every side of the dwellers therein. A piano with music upon the stand; a book turned down upon its face, lying on the sofa in company with a dark blue smoking-cap; some elaborate slippers, airing themselves before a neatly-swept hearth; a well-heaped work basket, keeping guard over which,

and deluging each article within with their sweet perfume, stood a glass of blue and white violets,—all testified to human presence. The carpet on the floor was warm and pretty: some combinations of green and gold, with just a sprinkling of flowers here and there. The furniture was neat and plain, but very comfortable; the windows large and light, and pleasantly draped; and at each window (there were two of them) was a perfect green-house arrangement, rare and costly shrubs and flowers, that made the pleasant room still more pleasant. A canary in a gilded cage hung amid these flowers, and sung in very blitheness of spirit as they entered. What a contrast to the scene without! The contrast gave it the aspect of fairyland.

And here they were left till Maggie should inform the young ladies of their presence; and Minnie was nothing loth to sit still and recover from her surprise before their arrival, for a great surprise it was. The sight of that room had reinstated Helen and Jessie in her former glowing opinion of them, but their brother now suffered not a little in her esteem. To him, all the plainness and bareness and uncultivated condition of the exterior was now attributed, while the culture within was as certainly all due to the young ladies.

“What an unpoetical fellow this brother of theirs must be!” she thought, contrasting the work within with the work without. “I wonder he tolerates all those beautiful shrubs and flowers; I fancy if he had his own will, a sewing-machine would be more to

his taste than a piano. Do his sisters really ever induce him to thrust his feet into these slippers? Can he ever don that smoking cap with its heavy silk tassel? They cannot surely be his."

The sound of approaching voices broke in upon her reflections upon the taste of the master of the house, and the next minute John appeared leading playfully forward a pretty girl of fifteen, with light, very light, hair, combed back from her brow, and flowing in curls upon her neck, and a complexion rendered still more brilliant by the nonsense of her companion, her own merry laughter, and a degree of shyness at the expected introduction. This was Jessie Campbell; her sister Helen followed more sedately behind, and Minnie no longer wondered that her cousin Harry so earnestly desired to have for a wife so sweet a girl. She was tall, and with a fine, fully developed figure; her movements were graceful and natural, but the charm of her face lay in her long, dreamy, violet eyes, and in the mouth, firm when closed, but frequently breaking forth into smiles which won upon the heart, whether with or without the will. It was a face you could esteem as well as love; the brow was good, the intellectual organs clearly developed, and the soft, abundant light hair, gathered in heavy braids behind her small ears, gave a classic character to the whole.

Minnie did not discover all this at the first glance; but during the visit she had ample opportunity for studying her new friend. Helen Campbell deserved her friendship, and Minnie Rayton was completely won.

"We will have a cup of tea, dear Mrs. Rayton," said Helen, with a pretty Scotch accent, after they had been seated some time, and mutual inquiries and mutual expressions of kindness and mutual details had transpired. "Alex is away with his men in the next section, but Jessie will blow the horn. He will be here by the time the tea is on the table," and ringing a bell, she quietly gave her orders, while Jessie ran off to fulfil her portion of them, attended, of course, by John, who declared it would be first-rate fun to see her blow the horn; he would not lose the sight for anything.

Minnie thought of the exterior of the house, the rough verandah and its corn-bags, and wished most earnestly that they would not call their brother while she was with them, or else that something would detain him till after their departure; and yet, from the loving manner in which his sisters spoke of him, he was evidently a kind brother, and shared very deeply in their affection. It would not do, however. Minnie tried to reason herself out of the feeling, but still it came again and again: a prejudice, and a strong one, was in her mind against Alex Campbell.

Unfortunately for that prejudice, his entrance a few minutes after did not tend to dispel it; for Jessie, on mischievous thoughts intent, had entreated John to make no mention of his cousin, and her brother only expecting to meet an old friend, Mrs. Rayton, had gone eagerly forward into the room just as he was—fresh from the farm—his suit of shep-

herd's plaid, slightly sullied by contact with soil and weather; huge boots extending far up each leg; and to crown all, a slouching felt hat upon his head, falling low over his brow, which in his hurry to greet Mrs. Rayton, who visited but seldom, and who was welcomed everywhere she went, he had forgotten to remove.

The flush that rose to his face, as after the first warm reception of Mrs. Rayton, he turned and encountered Minnie, was ample payment to his mischievous sister, but very painful to him, making what should have been a full and pleasant introduction a very awkward affair indeed. For the first time becoming conscious of his hat, he hastily removed it, revealing by doing so, fair waving hair, and eyes very much like his eldest sister's; but that Minnie did not acknowledge till long afterwards. The awkwardness of the introduction, and the colour that mounted even to his brow, she attributed to *mauvaise honte*.

"I expected only to find Mrs. Rayton here, and we are such old friends," he said drawing up his chair to the table. His accent was more decided than his sister's, and Minnie even quarrelled with that. Catching sight of the concealed laughter that was rebelling at repression in Jessie's eyes, he tossed the offending slouched hat across the table at her, and, with a good-humoured shake of the head, exclaimed,—

"Ah, Jessie! look out, my lassie, we will be even yet," and then apparently forgot all about it.

Alex Campbell, was about five-and-thirty, tall, stout, and athletic,—ungainly, Minnie would have said, in her present mood. He was not handsome, certainly, though his eyes were; but these were something worth trusting to, something definite: and that is saying much; for the countenance is not always an index to the mind, there being some faces that bear a lie impressed upon them, affecting to bear witness to what exists not. Minnie could not help acknowledging all this; but then she pronounced him to be a boor, and attributed everything commonplace or practical about the Campbell Dell homestead to him, while all the refined, the poetical portion, she assigned to his sisters.

It was impossible to continue uninterested, notwithstanding prejudices. The master of Campbell Dell recovered himself more quickly than she had given him credit for, and his duties as host were performed pleasantly and well. Minnie on the whole was pleased with her visit, and parted with Helen and Jessie amidst many promises of a speedy meeting again.

“We shall expect you too, Mr. Campbell,” said Mrs. Rayton, as they parted. How Minnie wished her aunt had not said that!

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEPARTURE.

THE friendship of the Campbells proved very pleasant to Minnie: it made many a break in the monotony of life at Glen Lewin, and threw many a gleam of sunshine over all the family. It was quite as pleasant to the Campbells. Helen and Minnie became inseparable friends, heart and hand in the same mission. Time, and a little more intimate acquaintance also, did much to rub off the effects of a first prejudice; and Minnie thought less severely of the master of Campbell Dell. Certainly, he always took care to remove the slouching hat in her presence, but Alex Campbell was no drawing-room beau; he hated conventionalism, he abominated foppery. Perhaps he erred on the other side; for, my masculine readers, it is quite possible to do even that. One may very readily reject the tinsel and frippery of life, and yet take goodly heed to that beautiful order and decorum so nobly set forth as an example in all natural objects. The very dewdrop washes the dust from the flower, and the sunbeams polish and brighten: a manifest reproof to the dusty coat and unglossed boot of those who disdain the little household refinements that go so far to make up our social happiness and pleasure.

We would not have our readers imagine that Alex Campbell in all his actions proclaimed himself a sloven; he was no such thing, but his regard for outward decorations was so slight that he thought but little about them. Of all men he needed the presence and gentle invisible attentions of feminine hands about him. The polished boot and well brushed coat, even the clean shirt and collar, must all be placed ready for him, or he most probably forgot altogether that that they were needed; not that he disliked these things, far from it, but from sheer forgetfulness. His very hat must be purchased for him, or he never would remember the necessity for the purchase, but, as we said before, he never again forgot to remove it in Minnie's presence.

There was one thing that elevated him fifty per cent in Minnie's estimation: he was a confirmed water-drinker, staunch to the backbone. His vineyard told that tale. Noble vines had been there of lordly growth, bearing on them right royal clusters,—clusters that his neighbours told him would produce a glorious vintage. Did he gather those grapes, and, crushing out the luscious juice, make unto himself the wine that is red, that dims the eye, and scatters the sense, and yields fire to passion? No; Alexander Campbell knew better than that. The axe laid to the strong roots soon destroyed the promised vintage. Vine after vine was torn from its resting-place, till only a few for the table remained.

"Welcome, right welcome, my friends, are you all,

to wine from Nature's bottle!" he would laughingly exclaim when they deprecated his action. "I know no other cellar. This wine will keep your heads clear." From this stand-point, no laughter, no sneer, could move him. He was not to be moved from the right; and the right step he believed he had taken. Minnie honoured him for his persistence. He grew in her esteem spite of slouching hat and unornamented exterior; spite, too, of those odious wheat-bags.

It was not very long before Minnie made the discovery that the attachment between Helen Campbell and her cousin Harry was indeed real, though there was no engagement existing. One quiet evening that they spent together revealed a great deal of their mutual thoughts and feelings. The two girls were seated side by side in the large window of the drawing room, looking west. They were watching the sun depart in its crimson glory, to light the other side of the world, and gladden with its presence countless myriads. They were, as we say, watching the departing sun, but it was not the subject of the thoughts of either; not the material sun, at least, for they had been speaking of the Sun of righteousness, that never sets, whose light is ever enduring and gladdening and rejoicing; for both knew somewhat of its influence, and were among those who love to speak of what they feel. It was this fruitful theme, fruitful enough to the Christian rejoicing in that sunlight. They had naturally spoken of those who were yet in darkness, who saw not the light, and among

these, Minnie sorrowfully remembered her own uncle's household.

"Kind, affectionate, and everything but mindful of their souls, and their eternal interests," sighed Minnie. "Dear as they are to me, it seems so strange, so lonely. So little respect paid to the Sabbath; no worshipping of God in the household, with the exception of dear auntie, and even she seems in the dark, seeking salvation in *duty*, not in a Saviour. The rest care little about it, particularly poor uncle and Harry. Ah Helen! what a fearful sin is intoxication! What a powerful hold it maintains, and how hard it is to root out the terrible evil when it once exists!"

"It has cast a sad shadow over my life," said Helen, in a low voice, tears springing to her eyes.

"I know, dear Helen; I know," replied Minnie, drawing down the fair head to her shoulder. "But there may be, there must be, a remedy for it. I do not give my cousin up entirely. And though I would not advise you to accept him while he continues as he is, I am not unhopeful that he will eventually alter."

Helen wept silently. She could not feel hopeful. Would the expectation of obtaining her love effect no change, what else could she believe would change him?

"It is the sin of the colony, Minnie, it is its curse," said Helen, bitterly. "Young men, promising young men even, who would make noble characters was it not for their insatiate thirst for intoxicating drink,

are utterly ruined by its influence. Not here only, but in every part of the colony; not only among the lower classes, but the educated, the wealthy portion of the community. Minnie, you talk of running a crusade against this many-headed monster. It is a worthy work,—a worthy, but a hard.”

“Strength and wisdom given for every day, Nelly,” said Minnie. “I would not undertake in my own strength, believe me; but God helping me, I will not quietly sit down and see those fair promises of youth blighted by this sore evil. I must do what I can, little as that may be. Above all things, Nelly, my uncle’s household demands my utmost effort, and you will give me your prayers?”

Helen looked at her, with her blue eyes gemmed with tears, in sorrowful surprise. “Ah, Minnie!” she exclaimed, “do you think that day or night either I can forget to pray for those who are throwing up life and health, and the best gifts of fortune, and worse than all, their never dying souls, for the vile seductions of the wine cup? No Minnie; my *last* prayer will be for them.”

Minnie had been three or four months at Glen Lewin and summer was coming on with hasty steps. Heat and sunshine grew each day in power. She found indeed, that the sunshine of England and that of Australia were two different things; and yet in her uncle’s house, with drawn blinds and closed doors, it was nearly possible to bid defiance to hot winds, blow they ever so fiercely. The broad hall widely

separating room from room ; the large, lofty apartments were cool comparatively, when all else had lost all sense of coolness. John told his cousin she had not half an experience of the heat, and teased her to come out and test its quality. But a little of this was quite enough ; she did not wish to test it twice. When first she heard that wind go whirling round the house, whistling down the chimney, and trying for entrance at the closely shut windows, she could scarcely believe that it was anything but cold. Whew ! the window she opened was more quickly closed. Surely a blast from some mighty furnace had crossed her brow !

And *that* was the hot wind ! Test its quality again ? No indeed, not she.

"Now, don't you pity us poor fellows who are obliged to ride miles in such a hot wind ?" asked John, in comic misery at the thought, as he made Minnie a glass of cool lemon syrup, carefully prepared, as an experienced hand alone can prepare it. "Are you not inclined to forgive the thirst that makes the public-house so welcome ?"

"Not in the least. I cannot forgive a thirst that must needs satiate itself at a poisoned fountain, while there are clear, pure streams at hand," replied Minnie, with quiet sarcasm ; "particularly when such a beverage as this awaits the asking," she continued, holding up the glass of golden nectar. "Plenty of beverages to be had without flying to intoxicating ones, John."

He laughed, and left her to enjoy her draught in

peace, for he had to face the hot wind whether he would or not.

John had now had a long "spell" at home, as he said, and he could not reasonably expect to enjoy it much longer. Edwin was coming home, and then he would have to exchange carpets and curtains, and the luxury of his home, and the refinement of his companion, for the bare walls of a shepherd's hut, the coarse fare of a shepherd's larder, and the coarse companionship of the shepherd himself—for how long he could not tell, but for one while he supposed. As he prognosticated, one fine evening Edwin's well-mettled horse rode gallantly up to the stables, was consigned to the care of the man, and Edwin himself quietly betook himself to the house, entering it as calmly as if he had only been absent for a day, instead of months; entering his room also, performed his ablutions, changed his apparel, and in perfect order from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, as quietly came into the sitting-room, just as the little party were seated at tea.

"Just in time to appreciate your salad, mother," he said, with a smile, as he returned her fond caresses, and took his customary seat at her side, as though he had never been absent from it.

"I declare you come and go like any ghost!" exclaimed John, rather indignantly, for this sudden apparition of his brother had both startled and disturbed the deep sense of pleasureable enjoyment he was at that moment experiencing.

"Nothing *spirituous* about me, John; you know that," returned Edwin, meaningly, accepting his mother's lavish attentions meanwhile with his customary quietude; for she was lovingly surrounding him with all the luxuries of the tea table.

"Better if there was," John muttered, as he doubled his bread and butter and cut it into infinitesimal pieces before he observed what he was doing.

Minnie laughed. "You came in so softly, Edwin," she said; "you quite startled us all. We have been looking for you every day for a week past, but just at this particular moment, we did not certainly expect you. Why, when did you come in? we never heard you."

"An hour ago; I have been in the house an hour. I wondered what had become of you all, I did not even see a servant."

"And you have really been in this house all this time!"

"He always does so, dear," answered her aunt. "We never know when Edwin is here till we see him," but she looked fondly at him as she said it.

And there he sat, in the midst of them, taking his tea, and enjoying it, answering questions as briefly as possible, and giving as little information on every point as he might without immediately transgressing the laws of politeness.

"A poor substitute he is likely to prove for John's company," thought Minnie that night. She felt sorry John was going; she had become attached to

him as to a younger brother. What should she do without him? How dull Glen Lewin would be in his absence!

And so it proved; for he went, and a great gloom fell upon the house. Minnie's gay, light breakfast talks, her brisk canters, her evening strolls, seemed all on a sudden cut off. She could never penetrate that reserve she thought. Edwin would never thaw sufficiently to become a pleasant companion. But how his mother indulged and idolized him!

CHAPTER X.

RENEWAL OF ACQUAINTANCE.

THE house was a different sort of place in John's absence. That very quickly appeared. Edwin filled no niche but his own, and that was a peculiar one. He went in and out quickly and silently, leaving them for two or three hours, or two or three days, with just the same amount of ceremony—or rather, with none at all. His mother was accustomed to his erratic ways, and was quite contented that he should come and go as he liked; though she once admitted to Minnie that she should feel less anxious about him if he would only tell her where he was going, and how long he would be before his return.

“My greatest fear is, Minnie, that some day he may take it into his head to visit England, and may think it unnecessary to come and tell me, or to say, ‘Good-bye.’ He detests ceremony, poor boy!” sighed his doting mother.

“Oh, auntie, he would surely never do that!” exclaimed Minnie, indignantly. But the sorrowful shake of the head that answered her, convinced her that there was some occasion for her fears, and the probability was a real one.

“What a pity he is so strange and reserved!” thought Minnie, two or three days after his return.

"I am sure his influence would be greater over his father and brother, were it not for that. I shall tell him so when I get sufficiently used to him; but not yet." And she looked wistfully over at her cousin, as he stood by the window busily employed in adjusting something he held in his hand, with his back to her, and, as she thought, either unconscious or indifferent to her presence.

"Here, Minnie," he exclaimed at length in a tone of disgust, "this will suit your fingers better than mine. I shall make a mess of it, if I have not done so already. Will you come and put this to rights for me?" And as she sprang up and went forward, she observed that the golden trinket that he held in his hand was a large locket, while round his finger curled a long silken tress of rich brown hair.

"Ah, ah!" thought Minnie, "a step out of reserve at least," and she held out her hand to receive her work.

"The glass fell out," said Edwin in explanation; "and I have wasted full half an hour trying to insinuate the hair into its place. Thank you; I thought you could do it."

"What fine, soft hair; a beautiful brown! The owner of the hair is young, is she not?"

Edwin smiled. "By what power of reasoning do you arrive at that conclusion?" he asked. "Can you always tell the age of a person by a lock of their hair?"

"Not always, certainly. Some hairs wither early,

and some retain their freshness till long past middle age," said Minnie. She was twining the long tress with infinite trouble into the space allotted for it; her cousin stood by and watched her. As she pressed the glass once more carefully over the truant tress, her fingers touched a spring; the locket flew open, revealing a small, but beautifully executed likeness of a young girl. "The owner of the tress!" exclaimed Minnie. "Oh, what a sweet face! so sad, too! Who is she, Edwin?"

"One who has reason for sadness," replied Edwin, bitterly. "Fair and refined and gentle, but thrown into companionship with a drunken father, and his besotted friends. Ah, Minnie!" he added, "if your theory could do good there, I should have some faith in the system; but while it contents itself with taking away the one solitary glass of wine from those who never transgress, let it go to the winds, say I." And he turned haughtily away.

Minnie followed him; the tears rose to her eyes, but she dashed them off.

"Will you tell me no more, Edwin? What can I do? How gladly will I help you if you will let me! Who is that lovely girl?" But his sudden fit of confidence had evaporated, and Minnie had the mortification of seeing him shortly after ride past the stables, and so into the high-road. He did not return that night.

"I shall find it out, whether you will or not, my good cousin," said Minnie to herself, with a very

determined set of the lips. "I have a clue at any rate, and no fear but I'll work out the rest. Can my theories indeed reach this desolate home? Oh, cousin Edwin, there is a power in prayer, and my heavenly Father limits not that power. We may ask and have: the command is, 'Only believe.'" And Minnie felt as if she had entered on her mission. Oh, if a great work lay before her, she felt also that underneath were the everlasting arms.

Meanwhile, where was he who had so strongly asserted that Minnie had her niche in the work-a-day world, and that he should yet see her occupying it? Where all this time was her quondam ship companion, Dr. Leigh? She had heard of him certainly, and of his progress at Clinton. Once indeed they had exchanged bows, but nothing more, for she was riding in the company of the Campbells, and the doctor was evidently in haste. He recognised her though, and the recognition was evidently a pleasant one.

Dr. Leigh was already making headway, and becoming popular in Clinton. His first case was a success, and practice flowed in more rapidly than quite comported with "the love of ease" he confessed to Minnie as a weakness of his.

At one end of Clinton, somewhat beyond the range of the last public-house, stood the dwelling he occupied: a house of four rooms built of substantial stone. A broad verandah was its only separation from the road, and the thick wooden pillars of this were tenderly embraced by the luxuriant foliage of

the dahlias and cape ivy. The clustering tendrils of these lent at once shelter from the noonday sun, and relieved the inevitable stiffness and lack of symmetry all stone houses will assume, whatever be the cost of their erection and however elaborately painted. A wooden bench beneath this green canopy was frequently occupied by the doctor himself in times of leisure, where, book in hand and cigar in mouth, he tried to make the most of the time that the inhabitants of Clinton and their ailments allotted to his relaxation. A strip of garden-ground at the back of the house, planted with a few trees, but chiefly given now to the growth of the vine, and the culture of vegetables, further relieved the eye by its greenness. The windows were bright and tolerably well draped, and the door bore on it a well-polished and rather massive plate, announcing at once Dr. Leigh and his profession.

In every sense of the word was the doctor popular. The ladies very much admired his polite and gentlemanly bearing, the young ones especially were eloquent in his praise, not the less because he most decidedly classed among the "eligibles."

He was already a welcome guest at many a home where marriageable daughters presided. The rich liked him for his skill and companionship, the poorer classes were equally in his favour, for his natural kindness of heart betrayed itself in the willing and careful attention he always bestowed upon them, however poor. He was thoroughly popular with

both, and still more so, unfortunately, with a class of young men who loiter about the bar of the public-houses, spending time and money, and ruining both health and fortune—he enjoyed a certain amount of popularity even with these; not indeed, that Dr. Leigh was vulgar in his ideas, not that the bar was congenial to his taste and feelings. He was so far thoroughly master of himself, that at present he had never transgressed the laws of politeness, never taken one glass more than his usual quantity. But nevertheless, he often loitered with those who did exceed, smoking his cigar in company with men who quickly lost the little sense they possessed in the fumes of spirits. He was popular with them for that reason, though, after all, the settle at his own door, the new magazine or book or newspaper, as an accompaniment to his cigar, were far more palatable to him.

Amidst all his successes he had not forgotten Minnie Rayton or her theories, and sometimes as his practice brought him in contact with the inebriated and the thousand ills attendant upon the sin of inebriety, he thought she was not so wrong after all. The sin of the colony met him at every turn, not only in the shingle houses of the poor, the unsightly, roughly-hewed slab huts, with their rude plastering of mud and straw, and their coarsely thatched roofs, but in the more pretending houses of the wealthy, in the dwellings of stone, with all those external gatherings that indicate a flourishing bank account.

Ah, and in how many forms the vice made itself visible! how many wretched homes were revealed to him in the course of his Australian practice! In how many houses did he not discover the skeleton! Strange that it did not make him at once renounce all tampering with the poison draught; strange that he still continued to look upon the wine when it was red; to discuss with those whom he well knew drank to excess, the *beauty* and the *body* and merit of the several kinds of wine—wine that was fast leading them downwards to their graves. Alas! “to him who knoweth to do good, and DOETH IT NOT, TO HIM IT IS SIN.”

Minnie Rayton had been a very pleasant and welcome companion to Dr. Leigh during the long, tedious voyage from England. There was something fresh and naive in her manner, that attracted him, though he had never thought of her as his future wife. It was something more in the light of a sister he viewed her, and as a sister had he missed her society. Sometimes he half determined to ride over to Glen Lewin and renew the acquaintance, but he had never found opportunity for doing so. He had, to be sure, received an invitation from John, with whom our readers are aware he had established a kind of friendship in a very questionable manner,—a manner that Minnie decidedly disapproved of; and from time to time little instances of the doctor's delinquencies, of the kind of society he was in, reached that young lady's ear, not unexaggerated by repetition, and made her less

anxious to continue the terms of friendship so well established on board the *Falcon*. Not that she gave him entirely up to the evil course they told her he was pursuing. She still hoped that some chance would throw her into his society, and that opportunity would not be wanting, for she had determined to reason at least with her quondam friend, and strive to win him away from the absolute dominion of the foe,—a foe that it seemed to her was eating away at the heart the very flower of Australian society.

The chance was nearer at hand than Minnie had at all calculated upon. One fine evening when doors and windows were all set widely open to catch what little breeze the setting sunbeams brought after the heat of the day, she was seated at the piano in the twilight, amusing herself by trifling with the keys, now indulging in wild improvised measure, now in morsels from nocturns or plaintive vales, soft and low and sweet, quite suited to the hour and the gloaming light, when the entrance of her cousin Edwin with a visitor put an end to her dreams and music together, and rising, she found herself once more face to face with Dr. Leigh.

“He had been called in to one of the shepherds close by,” he told her, “who had received rather a serious fall while in a state of semi-intoxication, and Mr. Edwin, who was present at the time, insisted on bringing him home to renew his shipboard acquaintance with his cousin.”

Very pleased he seemed to have the permission. That comfortable room with its soft carpets, luxurious lounges, and delicate draperies, was far more congenial to the "love of ease," than the bare, comfortable little room he had left, with its scanty furniture and solitary hard couch. The soft tones of the piano, the delicate breath of flowers that pervaded the atmosphere, were some of the very pleasantest experiences he had met with since leaving England. What a strong touch of refinement all these belongings threw around Minnie Rayton. He had never seen her look so well. The graceful folds of transparent black, as he termed it, became her wonderfully; and the single white rosebud in her bosom,—what more elegant adornment could she have chosen? She was Minnie Rayton still, that he soon found out, the same in thought and feelings and determination.

"Have you discovered your 'niche,' Miss Rayton?" he quietly and meaningly asked during a pause in the general conversation, while Edwin and his mother were busily discussing the shepherd's accident and requirements.

"I believe I have," Minnie replied; "I am striving to fill it."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "I knew you would," he replied, laughing; "no fear of that; plenty of work, real work, in Australia: I have found out that. Does the niche you occupy involve much work, may I be allowed to ask?"

"Not much at present, but it will; I *hope* it will.

I do not wish to be an idler in this every-day world, as you *know*, Doctor Leigh ? ”

“ And yet,” said the doctor, quietly, looking round at the tokens of luxury and wealth combined that met him on every side,—“ yet any one might be excused from idling amidst such surroundings. You have a beautiful home here, Miss Rayton.”

“ I would rather it were but a hut, with a shingle roof, Doctor Leigh, if these surroundings were to reduce me to a mere lounge, or idler, or make me forgetful of the talents committed to my care, which it would be at my peril to conceal,” said Minnie, with kindling eye and cheek. But her eye went down, and her lips took a sorrowful curve, as she remembered that, spite of the wealth and beauty around her, that in that fair house her mission was so sorely needed, that these things were incapable of bringing happiness. Perhaps Dr. Leigh read something of this in her countenance; perhaps what he himself had heard of the family failings further enlightened him as to the troubled look in the dark eyes that just before flashed upon him. Be it as it may, he did not speak, and it was Minnie who made an effort, and broke the silence.

“ You have plenty of work, I think you said ? ” she asked, perhaps for want of something better to say.

“ Plenty—too much. You remember I told you I loved my ease,” said the doctor, smiling.

“ Yes, I know ; but I am sure it would not be good for you, Doctor Leigh,” replied Minnie, smiling too.

"Is there so much illness at Clinton? I thought it was a healthy place."

"Generally speaking, it is," answered the doctor; "but saying nothing about *general* sickness, which climate and seasons and sudden changes of temperature *will* bring, I must say that I think Clinton and its neighbourhood have more than the usual chapter of accidents to record; I attended no fewer than four cases of accidents last week."

"How do you account for that, doctor? Why should accidents belong so exclusively, so peculiarly rather, to Clinton and its neighbourhood? Can you explain the mystery?"

"Well," said the doctor, "I suppose I can; though I am a little loth to do so to you, Miss Rayton, I confess, for it will only, I suppose, give you another argument in favour of those peculiar theories of yours. The accidents I have attended, I must confess, are nearly all attributable to either the direct or indirect influence of drink,—a common influence, I understand, of like occurrence all Australia over."

"I thought so," said Minnie in a low voice, and with a perceptible shudder; "and has not all this convinced you, doctor, that my 'peculiar theories,' as you call them, are right?" she sadly added. "Has not your experience at least convinced you of the great evil of intoxicating drinks?"

"Of their excess,—certainly. I always thought excess of any kind a great evil," was the doctor's evasive reply. And Edwin turning round at this juncture caught the last sentence or two.

"Oh, it is an old theme with us," replied Dr. Leigh, "one of our old ship-board discussions renewed, only with an Australian colouring," he added, with a slight bow to Minnie. "By the bye, Miss Rayton, you were playing most exquisitely when we entered the room. I did not know you reckoned music among your accomplishments, and I so seldom hear any good; will you favour me again this evening?"

Minnie rose immediately to reply; but a heavy heart accompanied her fingers. She was thinking over Clinton and its accidents, and their cause, and the many-headed monster against whom she had dared to lift her feeble arm. She had no further *tête-a-tête* with the doctor that evening; but they would be sure to meet again, and she would not allow him to rest in his apathy—not she.

CHAPTER XI.

A MIDNIGHT SURPRISE.

MINNIE went to bed, but not to sleep that night ; her mind would not rest sufficiently for that. If indeed she did dose off for a few moments, dreams scared away the gentle visitant, and uneasy and restless she longed for the day.

It was one of those thoroughly hot nights of our summer, when heat and insect-life seem readily to conspire with unpleasant thoughts to divest Morpheus of his power. Minnie threw open her window to the widest extent, hoping thereby to catch some truant breeze. Alas ! the breeze wandered not in, but mosquitoes did ; their monotonous singing, so sharp, so vixenish in sound, to say nothing of the irritation of their stings, only added to the intense heat. She tossed away the curtains depending from her bed on every side ; for delicate muslin though they were, fancy made them appear to her heavy obstacles to the entrance of air. Again and again her heated pillow was turned, till at last even that brought small relief. And then once more her bare feet sought acquaintance with the carpet on the floor, and wheeling a heavy lounging chair close to the window, she threw herself among its cushions, and sat looking out upon the trees, over which a warm moonlight was breaking in soft, rich beauty.

Not a twig moved. How still, how exceedingly still, was all without! Now and then a slight noise like a low, cautious, somewhat testy whisper, or a hoarsely drawn breath, bore evidence to the near presence of the nimble opossum, for she had learnt the source of that peculiar sound, though at first it had greatly alarmed her. As the moon rose higher in the heavens, its beams fell upon one of the noble old gums that yet reared its majestic head at the back of Glen Lewin. What a fine old tree it was! Minnie had learnt almost to love it, with its massive branches and drooping leaves, gracefully dipping downwards, willow-fashion, as though seeking closer communion with earth. It was the haunt of the magpie, and her ears were frequently regaled with the joyous, and bursting chorus from half a dozen throats, as the first rosy tints of day glanced forth. And there, too, a whole tribe of opossums rejoiced; she could see them now as they ran from bough to bough, the grey old parent, and her troop of little ones, gambolling like squirrels, and darting from limb to limb. It was not the first time Minnie had watched them; the sight was a pretty one, seen in moonlight, and amidst the shadow of the drooping leaves. But she was depressed mentally; the heat was not all that kept her awake, her own restless thoughts and restless spirit did that.

Very certain it is, the closer we look at sin and the miseries attending it—the less we look at the Saviour, whose power is infinite—the greater is our

depression likely to be. Poor Minnie was painfully learning that lesson. It is before the majesty and power of King Jesus that the mountain becomes a plain.

But watching the moonbeams as they gradually, dreamily stole over the landscape, playing fitfully on the waters of a creek that ran along at some distance beyond the window, where two or three splendid willows laved their branches, or gliding ghost-like through the trees, and weaving fantastic shadows wherever they went, did much to woo the coy advances of Somnus. A slight breeze that had stolen in with the moonbeams aided much in this wooing, for the leaves quivered and trembled beneath its influence, and the branches gently swayed to and fro. And then it stole still nearer, rustling the muslin drapery at the window, till one still bolder growing uplifted the dark hair, and softly kissed the now drooping eyelids, sealing them with its kisses, and Minnie was at last safely wandering in the land of dreams.

“Cooie! coo—ie!” The distant sound broke up the silence of the night, and Minnie’s pleasant slumbers were dissipated. It came ringing clearly down, somewhere from the front of the house, and then there was a dead silence again. Minnie started to her feet, and stood at the window listening. She had been asleep some time, for the moon was high in the heavens, and the breeze had gathered strength, and was playing some of its vagaries in her room.

She felt cold, and shivered slightly, for with the usual variability of our climate, the change arose in the middle of the night, and the air became as chilly as it had previously been heated. Rejoicing at the change, she was just about to close her window, and gladly creep back to bed to indulge in the comfortable slumber for which the cooler atmosphere had disposed her, when again the loud "coo—ie" burst upon her ear, and at the same time the dogs around took up the chorus, the surrounding height again and again re-echoing the deep-toned voice.

"Who is it? Who can it be?" exclaimed Minnie, trembling slightly; but the sound of opening doors, her aunt's among the number, reassured her. She opened her own slightly to catch the sound. It was her aunt's voice she heard.

"Edwin, Edwin! do you not hear? Get up, my son; it is your father."

"Uncle, at that time of night! was that all?" thought Minnie. But there was fear in her aunt's voice, in her hurried entreaty to Edwin, and there was meaning surely in the words in which Edwin replied:—

"I am just dressed, mother. The same old scenes of foolery over again, I suppose?"

There was a sigh from his mother; to Minnie it sounded a heart-breaking one, and then her aunt's footsteps sounded farther down the hall. A moment more, and her cousin left his room and came to her door.

"Minnie," he exclaimed, "are you awake?"

"Oh yes, Edwin; is anything the matter?"

"Father has come home," he returned in a low tone of contempt. "You need not be afraid; there is nothing to fear. Lock your door,"—and he moved away.

"Nothing to fear,—lock her door,—what mysterious words were these?" After that mandate she both locked and bolted it; but then stood still to think. To think, and to listen also; for her ears eagerly drank in all sounds now. And the first that saluted it was the opening and closing of the heavy hall door, and the echo of Edwin's feet upon the broad walk. She heard that from her open window.

"So her uncle had come home," she mused, and in what condition was fully proclaimed by the occasional cooies she heard, intermingled with bursts of stentorian laughter, and shouts and exclamations that no sane man could use. No wonder her poor aunt was afraid. Oh, what could she do to help her!

She threw a dressing-gown over her shoulders, unlocked her door, and went out. The hall lamp was unlighted, but a strong light came from the sitting-room, and guided her footsteps forward. Yes, her aunt was there, and dressed. She had thrown herself into one of the large chairs with her head bowed down upon its cushioned elbow, and both hands pressed to her eyes. It was the attitude of both fear and intense grief; but when Minnie came to her side, and caressingly laid her

hands upon the poor, bowed head, the face that uplifted itself to meet hers was tearless though perfectly white.

"Minnie, my child, go back to bed, go back to bed; this is no place for you," she exclaimed hurriedly.

"Come to my room then, auntie; oh do!" said Minnie. "I cannot leave you here."

"You must,—yes go—this moment;" and in the excitement, the delicate woman put forth all her strength, using both hands to second her words, for the voice was drawing nearer, the wild mocking laughter louder than ever.

"Auntie, I won't leave you here!"

"Child, you must! I dare not go; he must find me here. Oh go, go, Minnie, if you love me! They are here, they are here."

Even so, in the verandah, at the hall door. Minnie bounded from the room, and had just reached her own door as the other was thrown violently open, and in all the coarse hilarity of an inebriated man, her uncle burst into the hall, followed by Edwin, and some other man, (the man probably who had brought him home), who were both vainly seeking to restrain him. How she rejoiced at her own locked door then, and how she sorrowed and feared for her weak, delicate aunt!

"No light," she heard him thunder, evidently alluding to the extinguished lamp in the hall. "So that's how the master is welcomed? I'll be even

with you!" The next moment Minnie heard a shiver, and a smash. The costly lamp was lying in broken fragments all over the oil cloth.

"So many pounds out of your pocket, sir," she heard Edwin sarcastically exclaim.

"Pounds! who cares for pounds? Who says I care for pounds?" was the boisterous reply.

"Not I," said Edwin; "you have no care for pounds evidently enough. Can't you come to bed quietly, father?" he added. "It's nearly three, and will soon be daylight."

"Bed? I'm not for bed, my boy," said his father, relapsing into his rollicking half-drowsy voice, "I'm for supper. Get me my supper. Ah, apple of my eye, my lady fair! so you are up to welcome your husband home; glad I'm back, eh?" and he made a lounge towards his white, cowering wife, but Edwin interposed.

"Leave my mother alone," he exclaimed authoritatively. "You shall have supper presently."

"Ah, supper and wine, my boy; bring wine, rosy wine. Minnie,—where's Minnie? She shall mix it by Jove. Rum punch for ever! Minnie, my angel, come mix the flowing bowl."

Tremblingly Minnie heard her name pronounced; indignantly she listened to the nonsense that flowed from her uncle's lips; in tears at the disgrace to the name of Rayton; in bitter tears for her aunt's sore trouble, and twice pledged against the cause of all their grief: the serpent at the root, the worm at the

bud of all the happiness of the Glen Lewin inmates, —she walked the room backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, scarcely knowing what to do, and still the boisterous laughter mingled with songs and raillery went on ; Edwin's voice occasionally interposed in angry contemptuous expostulation.

All at once, amidst the shouts and mad laughter, arose shrieks from the lips of her aunt ; Minnie could stand it no longer. Unlocking her door, and rushing out into the hall, another moment and she confronted the group in the sitting-room, white even to the lips with fear and anger, her eyes flashing, and her dark hair burst from its confinement all over the shoulders of her white dressing-gown.

And there, as she thought to find, in the grasp of that terrible man was his weak delicate little wife, down whose throat he was striving to pour from a flask of brandy, he had suddenly taken from his pocket, and protested she should drink. Edwin was vainly interposing. It was Minnie's turn now. Springing directly in front of the madman, she exclaimed authoritatively :—

“ Uncle ! how dare you ill treat your wife like that ! You will kill her. Are you mad ? ”

The sudden apparition of that white face and figure, with the long dark hair half over her neck and shoulders, the flashing of the dark eyes full upon his, and the firm, daring voice, so unlike any he had ever known, for a moment staggered him. He loosened his hold—and his fainting wife, but for Edwin, would

have fallen to the ground,—and rose tottering to his feet.

“Heyday! what’s to pay?” he stammered. “Who are you?”

“One who is ashamed to couple *drunkard* with your name, uncle.”

“Drunkard! Who says I’m drunk? Come here, Minnie. Give me a kiss, child. What’s to pay?”

“A fearful, fearful reckoning, uncle, by-and-by, unless you change: wo for ever.”

She motioned him angrily back with her hands. The strange man interposed, and begged her to retire.

“No,” she answered; “I am not afraid; my uncle knows better than to harm me. I am not afraid.”

“Bravo, Minnie, my girl! Hurt you? not I—not a hair of your head. Well—well,” he hiccuped, drowsily—“what do you want, lass?”

“To see you drink this,” and she brought a cup of strong tea from the table, where a servant had just left it, and placed it to his lips. Thoroughly cowed, he drained it to the bottom.

“What next?” he huskily exclaimed.

“To bed, and wake to better thoughts,” said Minnie, in the same cold, firm tones, waving her hand towards the door.

Without a word, he suffered the man to lead him off to his room. She afterwards heard that he fell into the heavy slumber of inebriety across the bed, the moment he reached it, and thus they left him to his drunken slumber.

"Minnie, you are a brave spirit—a perfect witch!" said her cousin, in low tones of admiration, as he met her in the hall, on the way to her room. "Go to bed, child; your hands are perfectly cold. Mother is all right, and does not need you; and we shall hear nothing more of father till he wakes with headache in the morning," and he bent down and kissed the white face.

Was that the witch—the brave dauntless spirit—crouching in the corner of her large easy-chair, in an agony of weeping? The tension of the moment was gone, and hysterical tears had their full sway, till the rosy glow of day crept in, and lighted her to her pillow, and to sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MISSION IN WORKING ORDER.

THE breakfast table next morning had only two occupants, Minnie and her cousin Edwin. Mrs. Rayton was too ill to rise from her bed after the occurrences of the early morning hours ; and the heavy, senseless slumber of her husband was yet drowning all his faculties : he lay in little better condition than a beast.

"You had better have taken your breakfast in bed, Minnie," said her cousin, after sipping his coffee some time in grave moodiness. "You look no better for the queer doings of last night."

"Oh, I shall soon wear that off; it is my poor aunt I grieve for—and poor, poor uncle!"

"Well, upon my life, Minnie! I did not think your principles would permit you to pity a drunkard—mine won't."

"I both can and do pity a man who suffers himself to be a slave to his own passions. I can and must be sorry for one who, surrounded by the gifts of God's providence, can so wilfully throw those gifts away, and with them all hopes of another life; for it is written that the *drunkard* cannot enter heaven." Minnie spoke earnestly, and the tears came into her eyes with her last words.

Edwin eat his breakfast in silence. There was a

little contemptuous smile on his lips ; but Minnie was looking down, wrapped up in her own sorrowful thoughts, and did not see it.

"Well, Minnie, in my father's case what good can you and your theories work ?" he exclaimed, as at length they rose from the table. "Remember he is a *confirmed* drinker, getting worse instead of better. If you have a theory, work it out, say I. What can you do ?"

"I do not despair," replied Minnie, fixing her large dark eyes on her cousin's mocking face, and perfectly heedless of the sarcasm of his tones. "He that prays despairs not."

"But prayers are not always answered."

"Not in our way," returned Minnie ; "perhaps it would not be well that they should be."

"I shall be curious to see their efficacy in the case of my father," said Edwin, with a yawn of indifference, as he put his chair firmly back against the wall, and walked from the room.

Minnie was undaunted by her cousin's unkind sarcasms. She well knew the difficulties she had to face ; but she had taken up her mission, and she was not one tamely to relinquish it. Straightforward she had resolved to go ; the foe she would fight, even if she could not conquer. Minnie was a thorough temperance advocate, and still more urgent were her motives for being so now ; for the evil had come home to her own heart—to the very threshold of her affections. Oh, if she might only be permitted to

uproot it, to restore to Glen Lewin its pristine purity and peace.

With such thoughts as these, Minnie went off to her aunt's room. Her uncle had been placed in a little spare room at the end of the house—a room too often the scene of like intoxicated slumbers—bare of furniture, and in every way suitable to such a purpose. She found her aunt, as she expected, weak and low, and evidently suffering mentally. She received Minnie with a close kiss of affection.

"Dear auntie, what can I do for you?"

"For me, dear? Nothing—yet, yes; I have one message for you to take for me. I am not well enough myself. The shepherd that fell from his horse yesterday—I have put up a few things that I intended to have taken to-day. I must get you to do it for me. The hut is between this and the Camp-bells'. Do you think you can find it, dear?"

"Oh yes, auntie; but can you—can you be left?" Minnie hesitated. "*Ought* you to be left?"

"Yes; Edwin is here. Besides, there is nothing to fear to-day, Minnie," and the poor heart-broken wife turned away with a sigh that was pitiful to hear.

Feeling herself dismissed, Minnie went out to prepare for her task, first giving orders that the pony might be brought round to the back door, and that her aunt's basket might be in readiness for her.

How glad she was that she had learnt to manage that pony so well. Fanny seemed perfectly to understand her young mistress, and arched her pretty neck

gracefully, and took dainty steps along the highway that led from Glen Lewin and towards the Campbells'. It was a road with which she was perfectly familiar. She knew every way-mark well—every old stump intruding in the road. Minnie's bridle-hand had but little to do.

And how she would have enjoyed that ride in different circumstances! for it was a delightful day, fresh and lovely after the change. A few light showers had fallen in the early morning, effectually cooling the air, and imparting some degree of freshness to the dry, withered grass. The drops had made the little daring wayside flowers look up brightly and gladly from their hiding places, and had washed from the leaves of the trees some of the dust that the heat of many days had accumulated. Green parrots flew in any number here and there upon the fences, and bright coloured rosellas and shell parrots made the air vocal with their glad chirping. But Minnie's heart drank it all in, and yet shared not in the gladness. There were too many clouds in the home atmosphere for the glorious beauty of the pure ether above to dispel, though surely those birds had a lesson to teach. He who careth for the little insignificant denizens of the air, how much more would He not care for her? Even as the eagle, who fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings in order to teach them to fly, so God leadeth and guideth and sustaineth and teacheth His people, abundantly supplying all their need.

Minnie after a time drank in something of the consolation and truth, the strong words of comfort to herself. God could speed her mission; she would go straightforward, trusting only in Him.

She found the hut with but little difficulty; it had been pointed out to her before. It lay far back from the road, amid the shelter of a group of trees, while stretching behind it, down from the very hut side, was a deep ravine or valley, watered by a creek, along the sides of which a large number of sheep were grazing, under the care of a boy and two vigilant dogs. The shepherd himself was disabled.

A hut it was—and thoroughly deserving of the name. Minnie wondered in her heart why her uncle did not lodge his shepherds more comfortably. It was a two-roomed tenement, put together with the roughest slabs she ever remembered to have seen. Very little attempt at either levelling or straightening them had been made; and the interstices, of which there were plenty, were rudely filled with a kind of coarse mortar, the principal adhesive ingredient of which was apparently coarsely chopped straw. Windows there were none,—at least none through which the inmate could look out upon the beauty of the landscape, or even upon the less romantic traffic of the road. Two small holes, covered with dingy calico, let in some of the light of heaven; that was all. It was as though the dwellers within were forever shrouded by blinds, through which nothing to cheer the eye or gladden the heart might penetrate.

The very roof was disconsolate-looking; it was thatched, to be sure, with old straw, but so imperfectly, that pieces of stone and logs of wood were placed here and there upon it, to prevent its utterly blowing away.

With all this there had been some little attempt at gardening even here. One rose—a monthly rose—putting forth several heads, had strayed even to the solitary dwelling, vainly climbing to a window that refused it a peep within. It was a thing of beauty, nevertheless, and no doubt gladdened some heart there.

Rude cultivation enough the rest, chiefly consisting of the sickly green pie-melon, stretching out its long arms over the roughly turned up ground, two or three dwarfish-looking vines, a few potatoes, whose leaves were of no particular colour, and a bed of onions running to seed. Yet better far this than none; it gave a home-like appearance even to that poor slab hut; and the careful enclosure of sheep hurdles that surrounded it told how much it was valued.

Minnie opened the rudely constructed gate, and as carefully closing it behind her as though there were chosen flowers to protect, she picked her way along a pathway, scattered with pieces of broken crockery and empty cotton reels, evidently the playthings of a little child, that popped its curly head and dirty rosy face outside the door to peep at the stranger, and then race in to take refuge beneath the apron of its mother, who, hearing the footsteps, at this moment came hurriedly forward.

It was the shepherd's wife; a neat, comely young woman, simply attired in a dark print dress, rolled up at the sleeves, for she was washing, and the white lather was still all over her arms and hands. She received Minnie with a blush and a smile of welcome, and asked her in, dusting the corner of a rude slab for her to sit upon, and then drying her wet arms, took the child into her arms, and a seat, at a little distance off.

"I am come to inquire after your husband, Mrs. Wayte," said Minnie kindly. "We heard of his accident last night, and my aunt, Mrs. Rayton, would have been over to see you, but she is not well to-day, and has sent me instead."

"Thank you, miss," replied the young woman, the tears springing to her eyes. "He's not much better; he groaned awful all night, and now he seems stupid like. I think it's all along of his head, he bruised that wonderful, and two of his ribs, the doctor says, is broke. It's the drink that's done it all, that's it!" continued the poor wife, taking her apron to her eyes, which the little one vainly tried to pull down. "The horse is quiet enough, and so is he—a right good quiet man when he gets no drink."

"Yes," said Minnie with a sigh; "that's the evil, no doubt. No one can tell how much sorrow it brings into the world. Have you ever persuaded your husband to sign a pledge against drink? It would be a great thing for him if he would, and for you."

"I don't know, miss, as I have. If he would just

be content and take a little, as many of his betters do, there would be no harm."

"But he don't do that?"

"No, indeed; if he begins with one glass, he never will stop," said Mrs. Wayte, half in sorrow, half in anger, at the thought.

"That's the thing. Of all others, then, it would be better for him if he would never touch the one glass."

"The best conducted young man he was, when he married me two years ago," sobbed his wife. "A more soberer, more steadier young fellow, there never was, as long as we were in the bush, but we came down here, and too near the drink altogether. He and Mr. Harry were too thick, and my poor Ben is a ruined man."

"While there is life, there is hope," said Minnie, checking the sigh that rose at the mention of her cousin's name. Perhaps this may be the beginning of new life to your husband. The doctor says his case has nothing of danger in it; and should he be spared, he may yet be a sober man and you a happy woman. I will come every day to see you, if you will let me; and here is something my aunt has sent you," she continued, placing her basket on the rude slab table, "and she hopes if there is anything you want, you will be sure to send word by me."

"Thank you, thank you kindly, miss. I am but badly off for sheets, and old linen for bandages."

"You shall have them to-day, and pillows and

pillow-cases, too," added Minnie, rightly surmising that in that rude hut there could be nothing very soft for the sick man's aching head to rest upon. And feeling sure that the water in the tub was cooling, and that it would be kind not to prolong this visit, Minnie rose to go; winning the mother's heart by praising the rosy, healthy face of her little one, and the heart of the child by a seasonable "lolly stick," and finally by a *coup de état*, winning the way before her by asking for two or three crimson rose-buds that stood at the door way. Was all this diplomacy on Minnie's part? No, dear reader, it was the simple desire to please and be pleased with all she saw, that gave our heroine a place in so many hearts.

CHAPTER XIII.

MINNIE'S FRESH HOPE.

"A slave to selfish passion is the wavering creature of circumstance."
—TUPPER.

MINNIE'S footsteps turned slowly, very slowly, and reluctantly the homeward path. She would rather have taken the straightforward track that led so pleasantly onwards, terminating at Campbell Dell. But under present circumstances that was not to be thought of; besides, Helen and Jessie were again absent on a visit for a few days, and their brother was on bachelor fare.

The sun had risen a little higher in the heavens, and the heat was already much greater. Minnie's pony kept pace with her thoughts, which were very grave ones, for what a disconsolate, desolate house had hers suddenly become, in spite of all its fair surroundings. How highly she sympathised with Alex Campbell's devastating hand, as he tore up his noble vines, rather than their produce should be trodden in the wine vat and poured forth in the poisonous draught to madden and intoxicate. Just so would she have done, just so, indeed, would she like to do, if it was only in her power. Not, indeed, so much with the vines, for her uncle knew nothing of wine making, and did not cultivate for that pur-

.

pose, but with the wine itself, she would gladly, had she dared, have flooded her uncle's cellar with its choicest contents, if by doing so she could have restored him to reason. How kind he was when in the possession of his senses, and how terrific seemed the draft that sent those senses adrift, and converted him into a maniac!

She went on musing in this manner, and drawing gradually nearer home without observing it, when the sound of a horse's footsteps near her own arrested her attention. She lifted her eyes to meet those of her cousin Edwin.

"Edwin! where are you going? Not away again, surely!" she exclaimed, in accents of alarm.

"Yes, I am," he returned, smiling at her alarm. "Why there is nothing to fear; my father is considerably sobered this morning, and just as low and repentant as even you can wish him."

"But Edwin—this madness—it might return again; and my aunt,—I really think for her sake you ought not to leave."

"You can manage him best, it seems," said Edwin, half laughing: "I am sure your command was perfect last night, and far beyond main force. Rest assured he has never experienced the like treatment before: it had a half-sobering effect. No," he continued more gravely, "my father has had a week of it already; he will have a spell now for a time, and will be just in the mood to receive instruction."

"And are you obliged to go?" asked Minnie, sadly.

"Yes; and more, my fair cousin,—determined. I have my own affairs to look after; for this outbreak on my father's part convinces me we shall do better if we part company. And Minnie, after what you saw last night," he added in a bitter tone, "do you not think the quicker I rescue Edith from a similar father the better? A similar?—no, a thousand times worse in every sense."

"Indeed I do; and I will gladly help you if I can," said Minnie, eagerly.

"Thank you; I may claim your services some day, and soon," said her cousin, drily; and lifting his hat, he put spurs to his horse, and was soon out of sight and hearing.

Minnie stood looking after him for some moments, and then with a sigh resumed her way.

"Unhappy girl, whoever she is, with such a father!" she thought. "How strange it seems that with evidences like these before his eyes of the maddening character of drink, that Edwin still persists in declaiming against those who totally abstain. Ah! he does not comprehend the duty of 'abstaining from everything that causeth a weak brother to offend,' or he never would do it." And more determined than ever to advocate the cause of temperance, Minnie entered the gates of Glen Lewin, placed her pony in the hands of the groom, and quickly took her way to the house.

Her aunt was still in her room, too weak to rise, so she learnt from Bessie as she entered the

house. "But master's up," the girl continued, significantly.

"Where is he?" Minnie gravely asked.

"In the dining-room, lying down, miss; his head is aching badly enough: it always does after one of these bouts," she replied, rather contemptuously.

And Minnie, smarting under the degradation—for she keenly felt it so at that moment, being related to him—turned away, and went to her own room. Not that she intended to exclude herself there from the presence of her uncle; nothing was further from her thoughts, nothing further from the working out of her mission. With an intoxicated man whose senses are not in his possession, it is little use to reason, and Minnie knew that well. But her uncle was sober, or very nearly so, now, and suffering acutely from the excesses of the last few days. Now, then, was the time to drive in at least the "thin end of the wedge." Now, then, with the help of God, she would seek to show him the sin as well as the shame of his conduct; and if she knew that there was little to hope, that, as Edwin had said, she had a confirmed drunkard to contend with,—one getting rather worse than better with age,—she also knew that the battle was the Lord's, and that He could readily decide the victory.

Mr. Rayton had been lying on the sofa beneath the open window in the dining-room for two hours, expecting, yet dreading, the entrance of his niece. He

sufficiently retained the memory of some of the mad deeds of the previous night, and also that with their termination she had something to do, for the *dread* to be uppermost. A white, spirit-like being, with dark, flashing eyes, and dark, flowing hair, and yet, with Minnie's face, was perpetually before his disturbed vision. That was the Minnie he looked for, when she should appear; but it was not the Minnie that presently came softly in, and up to his very side. Not, indeed, with the buoyant step and bright, beaming smile with which she usually greeted him; but the eyes were certainly not flashing now; the dark hair fell in soft braids, and though the cool white transparent muslin she wore still to him bore tokens of the spiritual, yet it was a spirit of gentle mien, and with her entrance the dread was fast departing, though leaving in its train a keener sense of shame than perhaps he had ever experienced before.

"Come to scold me, Minnie?" he asked, in a subdued voice. "Well, I deserve it, I know that. Say on, you can't say too badly!" and he put both hands to his head, and covered his bloodshot eyes, for the sharp throbbings of pain were accelerated by his words.

"I am not come to scold you, uncle," was Minnie's reply. "I have not much right to do that. I am come to see if I can do you any good; and in the first place, I am going to make you a cup of coffee." And as she spoke, the servant entered with a small tray, bearing a miniature coffee-pot, cream jug, and sugar basin. Minnie quickly began to fulfil her promise.

"You had better give me a little brandy, Minnie; that will do me more good."

"I do not think it. For the time, perhaps, it might—only for the time."

"Where are the keys of the wine-cellar? The decanters are empty," asked her uncle, eagerly.

"I do not know, uncle."

"You are in the plot, I believe. They're not to be found. Well, if I meant to have some, I'd soon find ways and means to break the door. Minnie," he presently added, more quietly, "I'll take your coffee."

And Minnie gladly waited on him. A little joyous start at her heart at the thought of those missing keys came, too, as she sat by her uncle's side, and saw him drink more than one cup of the nicely prepared beverage. That, at least, was Edwin's work—a hopeful sign in him, she thought.

"Your head is aching badly, uncle, I see," she presently said, as she took away his empty cup, and returned to his side. "I will bathe it, and it will be better, perhaps;" and pouring some strong eau de Cologne into water, she proceeded quickly to apply the cooling preparation to the flushed and heated brow, her heart recoiling from the state the bloated crimson face revealed. And this was her father's brother!

"You are a good girl, Minnie—a good girl, and I am a bad uncle to you," were the half-choked words that came from the conscience-stricken man. "Why

do you do this?—for you must hate me. Why do you do it, Minnie—eh?”

“Hate you! I do not hate you, uncle,” said Minnie, sadly. “I love you, and grieve for you. I am troubled to see you killing yourself by inches in this manner. O uncle,” she presently continued, with emotion, “I would give anything if you would forswear intoxicating drink for ever! See how it is ruining you—what a fine constitution it is breaking up—what an unhappy home this drinking makes! My poor auntie, to whom you are so kind and indulgent and attentive when sober, you do not know how you treat her, what you make her suffer, at these times.”

“My poor wife! Yes, Minnie, I’m a brute—an unfeeling brute; and with no more steadfastness than a cat. Go on—say what you will—it’s all true. You hate me, of course you must.”

“I do not hate you: how can I? Are you not my own dear father’s brother? Oh, how would he grieve to see you thus! Can I help being distressed when I see you destroying both body and soul? Does not the Bible say no drunkard shall enter heaven? and can I contentedly see you drinking to your own destruction? Oh, I cannot—I cannot!”

“I’m too old to mend. I’m wrong—all wrong, there’s no doubt; but too old to change,” said her uncle, uneasily turning his face away. “Try it on Harry. He’s young, it might do—but there’s no hope for me.”

"Plenty of hope for you, dear uncle, plenty!" and Minnie's voice was certainly hopeful. "You can abstain at times, and I am sure for my sake you will try; for the sake of your dear wife; for the sake of your never-dying soul."

Well, well, I'll try. Keep the drink out of my sight—keep it away from me. Now I've had this bout it won't come again for a time, at any rate. May-be you may conquer; only let me sleep now, there's a good girl."

She did most gladly; for his promise made her hopeful. If she could help it, she resolved that those keys should never be found; the decanters never again be refilled. She left him to his own thoughts, and to the sleep he craved, with more buoyant thoughts and a lighter heart than she had had that morning; a heart that uplifted itself to the Source of all good, and acknowledged, with deep gratitude, even this first little promise of a successful mission.

Had she known fully how fierce was the foe that contended against her work—that even then the craving for drink was strong in her uncle's breast—her heart would have been less light, her fears greater. Happily for her comfort she could not see what transpired after she had softly closed the door upon her uncle; a small bottle was cautiously drawn from his pocket, the contents hastily swallowed, and the bottle itself was dashed far out of the window into the shrubbery. The aroma from that bottle would have

told its own tale; but Minnie did not return, and did not therefore discover that the sweet fragrance of her eau de Cologne had been superseded by the sickly fumes of brandy.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HIDE FOR ADVICE.

"HAVE you come to look after my patient, Miss Rayton? He is a fortunate man, indeed."

The words were Doctor Leigh's, as a few mornings after the events of the previous chapter, he turned from the shepherd's hut—where he had been on a visit to Ben Wayte, who was but slowly recovering health, and was yet unable to leave the house—and encountered Minnie Rayton, in her cool, lilac muslin, and broad, white hat, coming in at the little gate, the customary basket in her hand, now laden with choice fruit, and crowned with a glorious cluster of rare flowers.

"How is he to-day, doctor? And how are you?" said Minnie, with a pleasant smile, and a frank bestowal of her hand.

"The patient? Progressing surely, but slowly; a sober man would have been well by this; but Ben Wayte has been accustomed for some time past to too many potations. They don't agree well with broken bones," replied the doctor with a comic smile.

"The old tale!" said Minnie sadly.

"Ah! you are on your crusade still, I see," laughed the doctor. "How many Red Cross Knights have you enlisted in your service, may I ask?"

"I wish I could enlist you, doctor," said Minnie earnestly. "I should consider I had made a true conquest *there*." The colour came a little into her face at the expression that lighted up that of her companion at her words. Words are so capable of bearing two constructions. "I think," she resumed quickly, but quietly, "you in *your* profession might further the good cause so greatly. You have access to so many homes, and see so much of the evil of intemperance."

He smiled, and shook his head. "My mission, as you call it," he replied, "is to heal the body. The mind is the province of the clergyman, or such excellent young ladies as Miss Rayton."

"But this *has* to do with the body, doctor. Why, even in this case you say it stands in the way of your remedies, and retards a case."

"Yes, I have told him so,—he knows it; but if the man will be a fool, and will drink, I can't keep him sober."

"No," said Minnie thoughtfully; "but it seems to me that men who have no moral control over themselves, who will drink to excess, to the destruction of their lives and reason, to the misery of those around them, are nothing better than confirmed lunatics. They want constraining; they want confining. I would seclude them from the possibility of transgressing, just as I would seek restraint for the most dangerous maniac! What is drunkenness but madness, after all?"

"You vote for strong measures, I see, Miss Rayton," said he, still laughing. "You would get few to side with you, I imagine. This would be forging chains with a vengeance; *law* would prove too strong for you."

"As it is now—yes; but it ought not to be," said Minnie earnestly. "Law prevents a man committing suicide, from taking his own life in any way. And intemperance is but a prolonged way of suicide; why should not the law pass its acts against that?"

"You had better ask, Why are there not laws to restrain the making or traffic in any intoxicating drink?" said the doctor, with a sarcastic smile.

"I do ask—it ought to be!" Minnie exclaimed, energetically. "Poisons have a wholesome restraint upon their sale; and what are these intoxicating liquors but slow poison?"

"I see the niche you have chosen in the world will be properly filled," said Doctor Leigh, looking with covert admiration at the flashing eye and the crimson called to the usually pale cheek by the excitement of the speaker.

"Without I can do some good in the world it will not be," said Minnie, sorrowfully cooling down. His words were as water on the fire of her excitement.

"You will do good—you must!" said the doctor, warmly. "Your heart is in your cause, and that is the one great secret of success."

"I met with something in a magazine I was reading yesterday that pleased me very much," said Minnie,

thoughtfully arranging her flowers ; " and it appears to me to be the very thing that is wanted in Australia. An *hospital* for *drunkards* is really existing in France ; and their system is peculiar, but highly successful."

" Indeed ! What is their system ? "

" You would scarcely guess what, Doctor Leigh. They ascertain first, to what particular liquor the patient is addicted, and then, the moment he enters the house, every article of food is saturated with that liquor. He is allowed to drink nothing else. The clothes he wears, his bedding, everything around him, is so completely pervaded with his favourite poison, that at last he hates the very smell."

" Not a bad idea, either," replied the doctor. " But then, the various institutions of Paris are legion. You are surely not Utopian enough, my dear Miss Rayton, to think it possible that our new country could or would expend money for such a cause ? "

" No," said Minnie, " I am not ; though, I believe, were there such an institution, the lunatic asylum would be less crowded. Many happy homes would be restored. It would be, indeed, a blessing to Australia : whereas the love of strong drink is its curse."

" Well," said the doctor, laughing, and shaking hands, " it is so pleasant to stand and talk that I am positively forgetting that I have other patients to visit. I hear," he added, " that your uncle has returned home. I shall do myself the pleasure of pay-

ing my respects to him shortly." And, with another warm shake of the hand, he lifted his hat, and departed; while Minnie took up her basket of fruit, which she had rested upon a log close by while they talked, and went forward to the hut, quieting down her excited feelings by the remembrance of the sick man within.

Every day, since her first visit, she had found her way to the shepherd's hut, according to her promise, bringing many a ray of sunshine to the poor invalid by her presence and kind words, as well as unknown luxuries to suit a delicate appetite. The flowers and fruit were arranged with the most exquisite taste, though they were only to grace the rude slab dwelling.

"They make him think of you, miss, when you're gone, and bring back your words to his memory," said his wife with a bright smile, as she placed the lovely little group of flowers in a saucer of water, as Minnie had instructed her to do, just where her husband could see them best, and the basket of exquisite fruit carefully within his reach.

"I am glad he likes them," said Minnie. "We must make much of our fruit now, Mrs. Wayte, for I suppose we shall not have it much longer; the summer, they tell me, is nearly over. Your husband is getting better, the doctor tells me."

"Yes, miss—slowly—very slowly. But if he once gets well, he'll do. Thanks to you and to your kind advice, I do think he won't drink again. He pro-

mises me he won't; and, miss, if you have a pledge-book, I'm sure he would like to sign."

It was a new want to Minnie, a want she had not thought of; a want she could not supply. She had been so accustomed to esteem the inward pledge as inviolable, that she had nearly forgotten the outward, and the *need* for it now appeared paramount.

"I will see about it directly, Mrs. Wayte. Tell your husband, I will not come in to-day; and tell him we will sign together, and you will join us—will you not?"

"Surely, miss, and gladly. Ah, my poor Ben! if he only gets well, and keeps from the drink, we'll have a happy home again, yet."

"Yes, indeed, I hope so; and then you will indeed have cause to thank God for what He has wrought. Every good and perfect gift cometh from Him."

Minnie walked slowly home under the shade of the trees, perplexed and wondering how she should fulfil her promise, and obtain a pledge-book, for a regular one she deemed absolutely necessary in this case. She could devise no plan; nothing came to her memory; she had no helper; but with that thought, the name of Alex Campbell came to her aid: why should she not apply to him? Surely he would be both able and willing to assist her; though his sisters were not at home, for once she would waive etiquette, and go and ask his advice—it did not signify, she must do it; and so Minnie resolved in the cool of the evening to don her habit, and ride off to Campbell

Dell, without stating her business to any one at home.

According to his promise, her uncle had been perfectly quiet and sober for many days; at least, there had been no outward demonstration, no external outbreak; yet, in spite of Minnie's hope and desire, either the missing key of the wine cellar had been found, or a new one supplied, for the decanters were again refilled, and the fumes of brandy too often saluted her senses to allow her to delude herself into the hope that her uncle intended totally to abstain. He was a little afraid of Minnie; she saw that, and rejoiced in it; rejoiced that at least she had some influence over him; an influence for good; a power she could use against the terrible foe that sought thorough dominion over him. Things had thus gone on quietly, much the same as at first; Mrs. Rayton was about again as usual, quiet and silent, and loving to Minnie, but secretly sad. For a while, Glen Lewin was itself again; Edwin was still absent—building, Minnie heard, upon some land of his own. She remembered his last words, and thought he intended speedily by that demonstration to prove them.

And so Minnie could have no escort if she desired one. But she could manage her pony well, and ride without fear alone. She congratulated herself for the twentieth time as she set out on her self-imposed journey, and felt the soothing influence of the evening's balmy breath, for it was very balmy; an even-

ing of a golden sunset, with clouds all gold-tinctured, and a sky of mingled light and shade. It had been very warm during the day, and now this soft breeze that playfully shook the leaves of the trees under which she rode, was doubly welcome. She allowed her pony to choose his own pace for some time ; but then the memory of her mission arose more strongly before her, and tightening her rein, cantered gaily forward, and very speedily arrived within sight of her destination. As she did so, she observed the master of Campbell Dell himself busily engaged in rectifying some accident that had happened to the gate. He had never been seen to so much advantage before, and as he was perfectly unconscious of her approach, Minnie had leisure to observe it. The cool linen suit he wore, loose and easy, was in perfect keeping with his athletic figure ; the arm that wielded the hammer looked thoroughly fitted for any kind of labour ; while the forehead, from which the fair hair fell back (the slouched hat was on the ground this time), bore impress of mental energy that was not to be despised. The *tout ensemble* was strength, mental and physical, and Minnie felt at least she should not be disappointed in seeking aid here.

She rode forward into sigh and hearing, and looking up quickly, he threw down his tools, and came eagerly to her side.

"You have come to see Helen," he exclaimed, after the first salutations were over. "I am very sorry to say my sisters are not back yet."

"No, Mr. Campbell," replied Minnie, with a smile, and a slight accession of colour; "I have not come to see your sisters this time; I knew they were still from home; I am come to see you, for I have something in which I beg very much your advice and help."

He looked surprised, but very pleased. "Would she not dismount, and allow him to put her horse in the stable?" he asked.

"Oh no, Mr. Campbell, thank you; it is late, and if you will allow me, I would rather sit out here in this pleasant breeze; I can tell you in a few minutes what I want." And in a few minutes, as she said, he was possessed of her story, the simple narration of her visits to the shepherd's hut, and of the need that had grown out of those visits.

He entered with hearty sympathy into the detail. "Though it is the very thing of all others we want, Miss Rayton," he exclaimed, "the very thing that is needed, there is no such thing as a Temperance Society in Clinton. But as to the pledge-book, that I can easily obtain, for though there is no society at Clinton, there is one at Belmont, just eight miles from this, and in a contrary direction."

"At Belmont? That is where you attend church every Sunday, is it not? I have promised to go with Helen some Sunday, when she returns. I want to hear your minister."

"I think you will like him; he's a fine and worthy man," replied her companion. "Moreover he's a

grand advocate for temperance. Mr. Duncan has all we want, pledge-books and temperance tracts in abundance."

"Oh how I wish I could see him!" said Minnie. "This is precisely what I do want, Mr. Campbell; I must see him."

"Will you allow me to be your escort, Miss Rayton?" was the quiet reply. "I shall be very glad to introduce you."

"Thank you, Mr. Campbell," replied Minnie, very much in earnest; "I might not readily find the way alone, and my aunt perhaps might demur at my going so far unescorted, but I am afraid it will be a hindrance to you."

"It will be a pleasure, Miss Rayton," was the sincere reply. And Minnie believed it such. And so it was settled that he should call for her early the next day; and with that arrangement effected, Minnie took her leave, resisting all offer of present escort, and perfectly satisfied with the success she had already obtained.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLEDGE ADMINISTERED.

THE house at Belmont was no ideal of a dwelling. It was a strangely constructed house, composed of a number of small rooms opening one into another in most uncomfortable fashion. Moreover, it was erected on the side of a stony hill, so that the front was only to be reached by a long flight of very rude steps, while it was possible to walk out of the back windows at once into the open air and level ground. The prospect around was lovely—that was one compensating point—encircled by hills clothed to the top with rich foliage, it formed an amphitheatre of great beauty far as the eye could reach; while well cultivated land, clothed here and there by snug little homesteads, and in one or two cases by buildings deserving the name of family mansions, occupied the intervening space. The immediate surroundings of the house itself, however, wore by no means so cheerful an aspect. It seemed indeed as if out of such stony land, a spot of beauty and vegetation could never be redeemed; and yet the pastor evidently looked far less hopelessly on the task. Many of the stones were already gathered away, and something of vegetation had already been attempted, as a few shrubs bore testimony, and one or two hardy creepers

that were already climbing the posts of the veranda, and hanging a graceful drapery over what was so truly ungraceful.

Mr. Duncan was a tall, fine, stout man, with a forehead that bore good testimony to the intellect within, and a cast of features that betrayed great energy of character and firmness of purpose. He was, in fact, what he seemed, a thorough working preacher, one not satisfied with a stated round of public duties, not contented with a mere pew acquaintance with the members of his flock, but who busied himself with their home interests, going about from house to house, inquiring personally into their mental and moral condition, administering reproof here and condemnation there, and just a wholesome word of praise when praise was needful. He was welcomed gladly to the home of suffering, so well did he know how to sympathise, to administer comfort. The erring bowed in shame before him, knowing how well his keen eye traced out the offender and detected the offence. Like many of our Presbyterian brethren, he had a little world to himself in the congregation that frequented his church, and he was the king of that world, ruling over his people, and obtaining ascendancy over them by the force of a strong and vigorous intellect, and also by a kind and sympathising nature that despised not to take interest in the joy or the sorrow of a little child.

Of these latter he had indeed a "quiver full," and had he not also possessed a most economical little wife,

his slender income would by no means have held out to supply the numerous little frocks and pinafores, or to cover the multitude of bare feet that asserted their claim on his pocket.

Some of these same claimants on the small means of the pastor of Belmont's Scotch kirk, were here and there without the house, all apparently actively employed as Minnie and her escort rode up. One fine, tall youth was drawing up water from the well, with which he was copiously irrigating a small potato patch that grew on one side the house. A second was carefully weeding a small plot of rather sickly-looking flowers, and a sweet little girl with a head covered by sunny curls came out from amidst a few vines with a plate of ripe grapes she had just gathered. It was to this last little girl they applied to ascertain the whereabouts of the pastor.

With a smile of recognition for Mr. Campbell, and a shy, blushing glance at Minnie, she answered, "Papa was at home," and ushered them up the flight of awkward steps into a little room that opened on to the veranda—half sitting-room, half study—for there they found the minister surrounded by his books.

Minnie could see that his heart was in his work, for the smile with which he turned to her when her companion had explained the cause of their visit, and the hearty grasp he gave her hand, she felt were genuine.

"Miss Rayton," he exclaimed with a broad Scotch

accent, "I am glad to see a young lady engaged in the temperance cause, for more than one reason: wholesome truths often come best from feminine lips, and I believe you will be successful; I pray God you may! I have thought much of Clinton and its neighbourhood lately, and bemoaned the condition of many of its inhabitants. Now, who knows, this may be the nucleus of a society. You shall have all you want from me most gladly,* and all the help I can give you I shall joyfully afford at any time."

Minnie thought she would like him to visit at her uncle's, but she could not bring his name into the conversation. She could not ask him to call; but as though he understood her scruples, he presently said,—

"I shall be anxious now about your progress, and when I come to see Mr. Campbell and his sisters I shall be glad to call upon you. 'The harvest is plentiful, and the labourers are few.' Miss Rayton, we are rejoiced to recognise a fellow-labourer at all times. This is what you should have done long ago, Alex Campbell," he continued, turning with a half-reproaching smile to the young man.

"The honour was reserved to Miss Rayton," he returned, with a slight bow, and an exceedingly contented look. "I shall be happy to follow in her wake."

A meaning smile gleamed in the minister's eye for half a minute, and lingered about the corners of his mouth, but he was too discreet to give further

expression to his thoughts; and after vainly endeavouring to detain them to take refreshments, he dismissed them with the requisite books, and kindly entreating a visit at some future time, saw them through his paddock, out at the slip panel, which he put up after them, and so out into the road, and homeward.

Minnie learnt more of Alex Campbell during that ride than all the previous interviews had informed her. She found him very kind and very companionable, readily entering into all her plans, and sympathising with her difficulties. Most of those difficulties he knew without her entering into them. Harry's and her uncle's failings were perfectly familiar to him. The utmost extent of influence one friend can exert over another, he had used towards Harry, and yet without avail. For his sister's sake he had done all that was possible to reform him; for her sake he was glad that there was now other influence at work beside his own. He candidly told her so—told her how dear that sister was to him, and how he feared that her heart was bound up in Harry Rayton past recovery. It troubled him that her life must thus be blighted; but Minnie spoke hopefully; spoke of her own determination to win Harry from his downward course; spoke too of the efficacy of prayer. "We may yet see answers to our prayers in this respect," she continued with glistening eyes. "But, ah, Mr. Campbell, we must not pray and forget to watch!"

And thus was the homeward way beguiled. Minnie indeed scarcely knew how near home they were, till Alex Campbell drew rein at the shepherd's hut, and asked her if she would like to fulfil her mission there.

"Oh, yes! by all means," said Minnie, with animation. "And you will be our witness, will you not?" and she took his hand, and leaped lightly from the saddle as she spoke; and then he led the way to the little sheep-hurdled yard, with its tiny gate, the important packet of books in her hands, and a glad smile upon her lips.

"This you see is my *first* convert, Mr. Campbell. You cannot wonder at my pleasure," she exclaimed in explanation of the gladness that beamed from her eyes. He was not surprised, and though he said nothing, he only admired more the spirit that actuated the conduct of his companion, and in his heart, if not with his lips, bade her "God-speed!"

There was a group worthy of a painter presently gathered in that rude hut. The softened sunlight came with chastened beauty through the simple calico window, and showed that the earthen floor was carefully swept; that the huge, gaping chimney was filled with fresh boughs, and that one or two saucers of lovely flowers, carefully tended and preserved, were lending a grace and beauty to the rough shelves and rougher table. Mrs. Wayte was washing again, but she had taken her tubs to the back of the house, where she had ample shade from

the heat of the sun, and where her large three-legged pot stood over a fire constructed between some large stones on which it was placed. The child had, however, given warning of Miss Rayton's approach, and Mrs. Wayte immediately came into the house with a warm welcome, drying her arms from the snowy suds as she spoke, and then going round to her husband's side she stood leaning on the back of his chair.

A comfortable chair it was ; one of Mrs. Rayton's providing, and stuffed with soft cushions. It must have been indeed a comfort to the poor invalid, whose pale countenance betrayed how much he had suffered for many days. He was rather an interesting-looking young man, with dark eyes and long, dark hair. The paleness and delicacy of sickness, perhaps, added to that interest. But the smile that came beaming into those eyes on Minnie's entrance, fully revealed to Alex Campbell with what pleasure those visits of hers were received, and how much her winning manners furthered her purposes of good. Indeed, he begun to wonder whether it would be possible to refuse her anything. Was he not treading on dangerous ground, gentle reader ? We are apprehensive he was.

It was a pleasant group that gathered round the table over that open pledge-book,—Minnie in her long riding habit, with her hat thrown off, and her dark hair pushed back from her clear, open brow—Alex Campbell, in all his manly strength and high-

towering above her, a well-pleased witnesser of the deed that was to follow; the invalid, into whose pale cheek a little flush of excitement had ventured, and whose unaccustomed fingers trembled at the thought of holding a pen; his wife bending over him, with her fond, loving eyes alternately regarding him and Minnie; and above all the little rosy cherub of a child, who unobserved had climbed upon the form, and with round eyes of astonishment stood silently looking from one to another.

Never before had the solemn words of the pledge sounded so sweetly, thought Alex Campbell, as Minnie, preparatory to heading the list with her own signature, read slowly and distinctly over the form appended to every pledge-book, by which a thorough renunciation of all intoxicating liquors is fully made, and then, as she finished, she took up the pen and firmly inscribed on the first page, immediately beneath the pledge, her own pretty signature, "Minnie Rayton," and passed it to the shepherd. After that example, if the B of Ben and the W of Wayte, were crooked and trembling, it was the weakness left by illness, and the fingers so unfamiliar with the pen, and not indecision, that occasioned it. If there had been any doubt as to the sincerity of the signer, the low-breathed "So help me God," with which the pen was given into the hands of his wife were sufficient evidence to the contrary. There was neither quivering or trembling in the hand that next grasped that important pen, and wrote in firm, round,

school-girl hand, and thickly-lined and quiet-looking letters; the "Mary Wayte" looked decidedly as if the writer knew what she was about, and so Minnie thought as she laid the book out in the sun at the door, with a stone on the pages, that the energetically-written words might dry.

It was her *first* convert; but before she laid her head upon the pillow that night she most earnestly prayed that it might not be her *last*.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ORGIES OF BACCHUS, AND THE RESULT.

MINNIE'S first summer in Australia passed rapidly away; the short, pleasant days of autumn followed in their wake, taking with them drapery from the fruit trees, and leaving in their place a rustling of dank, faded leaves upon the ground. Her uncle still remained at home, and her cousins still absent; so that but for her ability to ride, and her visits to Campbell Dell, her life at Glen Lewin would have proved very quiet and monotonous. As it was, those visits revived and did her good, and her daily rides brought a little colour to her usually pale cheeks, and a light to her eyes, which her friends thought very pretty to behold.

There had been no serious outbreak on the part of her uncle to disturb the current of still life at Glen Lewin, but there were sufficient indications to convince those most concerned that the foe only slumbered, or rather, feigned slumber that had no reality in it. Sometimes he would absent himself from home for two or three days, and then his return was expected with anxiety and apprehension, both by his wife and niece. But Minnie's influence had so far extended itself as to induce him to keep away from her range of vision while under the direct influence

of intoxication, though he could not conceal the effects of his dissipation: the coarse, bloated face, bloodshot eyes, and trembling hands, still remained as evidences of the subtle poison that lurked within his veins. It was only now and then, Edwin once told her, and told her truly, that his father broke through all bounds of decency, and presented himself a spectacle to his own household; but she found that he was still in the daily habit of imbibing what would have locked up the senses of many another man. His half promises were forgotten; the spirit flasks were again and again renewed, emptied, and renewed; and often in the evening, after dinner, when, with his handkerchief over his head her uncle took his customary nap, Minnie sat in trembling apprehension, watching the almost purple hue of his countenance, and his laboured breathing, and secretly praying for help that this terrible giant, Intemperance, might be overthrown, and that no harm might befall the sleeper in his inebriated slumbers.

Mr. Rayton was, as his son John said, of a convivial turn, and his friends were generally of the same character. After a while, gentlemen from the homesteads round, from Clinton or Belmont or its neighbourhood, who had no objection to the contents of the Glen Lewin cellar—often dropt in to dine, and spend the evening in the way most congenial to their host. Minnie's sensitive nature shrank from contact with such society, but by-and-by, when she discovered that she possessed powers of attraction

superior to the wine cup, and in some cases might successfully compete with it; when she found that the sweet music discoursed by her eloquent fingers, or the soft tone of her very sweet voice, had the effect of shortening the bacchanalian revels, and attracting the guests to the drawing-room,—however much against her own inclination, she exerted those powers to the utmost, and felt well repaid by seeing those guests depart with comparative sobriety, and her uncle retire to his room in possession of his senses, instead of in the half-idiotic, half-senseless condition that usually followed a night's excess.

Among these evening visitors, Dr. Leigh often made his appearance; Mr. Rayton rather liked and encouraged his visits. He was a good companion, could talk on any subject, suiting his conversation to those with whom he conversed. He was, in short, "all things to all men," and among the generality of men, passed for a thorough "good fellow." It might have been policy on his part thus to pander to universal taste, and yet it scarcely was so. He was naturally too indolent to be politic, and the love of ease he constantly professed was often at the root of what might appear mere policy. He "loved his ease," and therefore everything that detracted from it was obnoxious to him. He seldom cared to argue, even for the right or wrong of the thing, when it was the easier course to acquiesce. With Minnie, alone, he found it a pleasant thing occasionally to break a lance, and even this, because it was pleasant, not for

profit or gain. Her arguments he never tried very seriously to overthrow, but he enjoyed the flush, and sparkling eyes, that generally came as a result of the argument; and then, after well drawing her out, he was often pleased to bring her down from her elevation, by his quiet and tantalizing remark :—

“After all, my dear Miss Rayton, I dare say you are right.” Minnie felt she could have made more progress with a point-blank denial of her sentiments; that in spite of his apparent acquiescence, he was not a tithe nearer conversion than if he had never acquiesced at all. Meanwhile, in spite of his assumed agreement with her principles, he was as readily falling in with those of her uncle and his friends, at least, so far as cordially joining with them in toast and in song; though Minnie noticed, when she had an opportunity of doing so—for she usually retired immediately after dinner with her aunt—that the doctor's glass did little more duty than supplying an excuse for his seat amongst them. In fact, he cared little for wine in itself, as we have before observed, and Minnie had never seen the least symptoms of exhilaration; while those with whom he so freely mingled were far beyond the bounds of propriety. Perhaps he thought she would esteem the difference, and accord him some meed of praise: he was mistaken. How indeed could she? Was he not tacitly consenting to the revel, while he partook of the same board; while he held up the red wine, and admired its sparkle and flash; while he praised the vintage,

and sung in its praise? No; indeed, to her he seemed even more culpable: he was forging fetters for others, riveting their chains, and that they were powerless on himself was no reason of glory.

One evening, three or four gentlemen returned home to dinner with Mr. Rayton, the doctor among the number. The dinner was *recherché*, doing credit to the domestic capabilities of the hostess, as it usually did, and duly appreciated by the gentlemen, as gentlemen usually do appreciate these matters. The wine circulated pretty freely, even at the dinner table, and Minnie more than once saw her aunt's cheek grow pale, as she cast timid, frightened glances at her husband. He, for his part, was far too actively employed at the head of the table to take the least notice of her. Even Minnie for once was quite disregarded, though she watched anxiously to meet his eye, hoping that some of her influence might yet be produced. It was in vain, however; he seemed this evening purposely to avoid even glancing towards her, as she sat in the corner by her aunt; seemed, indeed, as if he ignored her presence. Her aunt remained unusually long at the table, but at last she rose, and Minnie reluctantly followed. It seemed so much like leaving unlimited licence for excess behind her, that she hated the formal necessity that compelled the movement.

Mrs. Rayton passed on to her own chamber, and Minnie went alone into the drawing-room. How pleasant and quiet it looked after the scene she had

just left. A splendid bed of coals upon the hearth from a huge log, spread delicious warmth over the room. The chandelier shed soft and tranquil light; the handsome curtains were closely drawn. Books of every description, mingled with engravings, lay about the tables in pleasant confusion. The wax candles on the brackets of the piano, stood waiting to illumine Minnie's music pages; but Minnie's heart was sad, and turning from the piano, she went and crouched down upon the hearthrug before the fire, and buried her face in her hands.

Was this the progress of her mission? What good had she yet been able to effect, where she most desired it? was it all to prove in vain? and would nothing stay her uncle in his mad career? Nothing, certainly, while he had such a set of companions. She could hear their increased revelling echoing along the hall, from the partly opened door of the dining-room; hear that it was increasing in height, and, above all, that her uncle's voice was dominant. Her poor aunt! was there to be another fearful night? She must nerve herself for it. What could she do? How helpless she felt! What could she do against such a dreadful foe? Pray—yes she could pray; and oh with what bitter supplication did she turn towards her heavenly Father, reminding Him of His promise of help to those in need. He would ever be reminded by His children. He has promised to hear and to attend their cry. Yet, even while she prayed, down on her knees upon the

hearthrug, the revel was increasing in height every moment, loud laughter, ribald songs, and coarse oaths every moment came to mingle with her petitions. As she knelt there, her aunt presently came in, and kneeling down beside her, put her arms gently round her, and kissed her with pale, trembling lips.

"Ah, Minnie, it is fearful! fearful!" she whispered faintly.

"Yes, dear auntie. But do not be afraid; God can help us; God can take care of both us and him," she added sadly. "If we could only pray more earnestly, and in *faith*."

"It seems to me that I cannot pray," answered Mrs. Rayton, tearfully. "I have prayed so long without avail; I am hopeless now."

"'While there is life, there is hope.' God can yet interpose, dear auntie. Ah, how fearful a poison is intoxicating drink! If men would only see it! I wish there was anything that I could do, to put a stop to it."

"There isn't, dear; there is nothing; they are too far gone to care for your music, Minnie. I always dread Mr. Lawton's visits, for they always result in evil; he comes with the determination to 'make a night of it,'—a dreadful night it is likely to be!"

"Nevertheless," said Minnie, rising, "I will try music's power once more; it may be effectual, even now;" and she went to the piano, and ran her fingers over the keys softly and sadly and slowly, at first, but gradually rising into livelier, brighter, more

cheerful strains,—martial and inspiriting to any but the soul of an inebriate, and to these it seemed powerless. The revelry went on without let or hindrance; the loud laughter and odious songs sent strong discord through Minnie's melodies; and, disheartened at length, she returned to the fire, and crouched down in her former position.

"No use, dear; I knew it," said her aunt, with a broken voice, looking up from the shadow of her hand. "We must just leave the result to God."

"If we only leave it to Him, it will end all right, however it end, dear auntie," Minnie answered, almost as sadly; for she felt depressed, felt powerless, and wondered to herself if she should ever be permitted to do good in the way she so much desired,—good to the Glen Lewin household.

An hour passed away, and they still sat alone. There had been no cessation of the bacchanalian sounds; no inclination or sign of cessation. "It will go on till midnight," said Mrs. Rayton; and Minnie thought it most probably would.

All at once, there was a sudden sound of a heavy fall, followed by as sudden a silence from the adjoining room. They sprang to their feet, and rushed out into the hall.

"What was it? What was it?" Indefinite fear seized them both. For a moment they stood trembling together on the threshold. Then Minnie went boldly forward to the dining-room door. It was hastily pushed open as she reached it. And then a scene indeed awaited her view.

"What is the matter?" she hurriedly asked of the gentleman who opened the door, and who was hastily passing out,—“What has happened?”

“Mr. Rayton—a fit I believe,” was the hurried reply. “The doctor is with him. I am going for more assistance.”

Even so, prone on the floor, his head supported by one of his suddenly sobered guests lay the lord of all the misrule, purple in the face, and breathing heavily, and perfectly senseless. There lay Minnie's poor unhappy uncle amidst the debris of overturned chairs and broken glasses and decanters. Another moment, and with a faint cry his wife was at his side, and Minnie followed, white and trembling; but ready to attend the doctor's order. The great clock in the hall struck ten solemn strokes. It was two hours before midnight; but the revel was over, and ended in such a way as to sober the disorderly guests and bring back their scattered senses. Well indeed was it that the doctor had not departed from his usual abstemiousness; for all his skill was needed to preserve the life that appeared to balance on a thread.

Was this the answer to prayer? thought Minnie, as in sorrow she watched them carry the senseless form of her uncle to his bedroom, scarcely knowing whether that room would not shortly be converted into a chamber of death. Should death terminate these fearful doings, and such a death, how could they bear it? Tears sprang again and again to her

eyes, as she stood waiting on her fainting aunt; bathing the pale face and hands, and almost dreading to see her restored to her senses and her grief. How bitterly, again and again she bemoaned the enemy that had wrought this evil; the serpent at the root of all their misery.

"Do not grieve too much, Miss Rayton," said a quiet voice at her side. "I do not apprehend danger,—at least not imminent danger. The remedies are beginning to be successful; you can tell your aunt that when she recovers sufficiently."

"Ah, Doctor Leigh!" reproachfully; and fully he understood the tone of reproach, for he turned quickly on his heel to leave the room, without a word of answer. He returned, however, a moment after, just to tell her that he should remain all night, that suitable remedies had been sent for, and that if she needed him, or her aunt was worse, he was at her service. And so he left her with the feeling that she thought him very culpable. How could she help it?

CHAPTER XVII.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

THE twelve strokes of midnight sounded, but there were no bacchanalian sports to mingle with those strokes. The house was in confusion; but it was the confusion of sudden sickness, not revelry. Lights flashed here and there, and whispered voices and anxious murmurs, and rapid though muffled footsteps echoed to and fro. And meanwhile, the master of the house still lay senseless on his bed, with but little further symptoms of amendment, spite of the unremitting attention he received, and the solicitude by which he was surrounded.

The messenger to Dr. Leigh's surgery had long since returned with the requisite remedies. Another had been despatched for Edwin Rayton, and still another for John; they were not likely to arrive till morning. Mrs. Rayton had recovered from fainting; and as if the danger her husband was in revived her, she was now a quiet, silent, but by no means inactive attendant at his side, eagerly waiting for some sign of dawning sense, and surprising the doctor by the apparent calmness of her movements. There seemed little for Minnie to do but to watch and wait, and give occasional aid as it was needed. It was a painful office; and, with hands clasped tightly together,

she paced backwards and forwards the whole length of the room, from the hearth to the piano, praying earnestly that her uncle might be spared, and that good might yet spring out of this evil.

And so that long night was passed between weary waiting and watching and agonized prayer. The doctor had looked in upon her several times, reporting progress. Several times she had looked also upon the senseless, breathing form of her uncle, scarcely able though she was to see through her blinding tears the wreck that intemperance had made. That her uncle!—her dear father's much-loved brother! Ah, how almost impossible it seemed! and yet it was so. So fondly she had often heard him speak of his dear brother John—John with the full, open brow; and now upon that brow was legibly written the brand of an inebriate—a *drunkard*!

“Miss Rayton,” the doctor exclaimed, once when he came into the drawing-room, after one of her visits to the bedroom, and found her weeping bitterly, her head bowed down upon the sofa, “Miss Rayton, I shall have you for a patient next, I am afraid. Your uncle is in danger, but not very seriously so. I apprehend no fatal result; and believe I shall be able to bring him safely round. You excite yourself too much. I wish you would allow me to persuade you to take a little wine. You really require some stimulant.”

“Oh, doctor!” cried Minnie, springing up and throwing back her hair from her flushed brow, “is

it possible you can recommend wine now, after all that has passed? Don't you think that if I were not already pledged beyond recall, I should be doubly, trebly pledged now?"

"I am aware of your scruples, but cannot sympathise with them. Why the abuse of a thing should make the moderate use a curse or exclude it altogether, I cannot see, and don't think I ever shall," replied the doctor, with a half satirical smile.

"And yet it seems so marvellous to me that you cannot see it!" said Minnie, in surprise. "It is such an evil, an evil that *grows*—yes, *grows*, doctor,—you know it does. It does not come upon men, or women either, all at once; it insinuates itself a little at a time, little by little, drop by drop, a subtle poison. Ah, doctor, is it not so?"

"You seem to have studied the subject so well, Miss Rayton, that I must not gainsay you; of course I could remind you of numberless instances where moderate drinking is productive of no ill results, and where there are no evil or serious terminations. I believe it to be so as a rule; the reverse is the exception."

"The exceptions are sufficient for me," said Minnie, sadly. "I can have nothing to do with a rule that admits such exceptions. Oh, doctor, how can you—you who must daily be brought into contact with the evils of this poison, who must constantly have before you the sin and the fearful consequences of intemperance! Look at my poor cousin Harry—you

have heard of him, though you have not seen him—what a wreck he is becoming! And then, my poor, poor uncle!” She broke down again in tears.

He rose much discomfited, not knowing what to reply. But presently he came to her side, and laying his hand gently upon hers, kindly exclaimed, “Miss Rayton, I am doing, I will do, all I can to restore your uncle. I think you will yet have influence over him; and perhaps even I may yet become a convert.” And turning from the room, he left her, to resume his station at his patient’s side.

“A convert! Ah, Doctor Leigh, it is greater power than mine that must convert you. Yet that power is unlimited; it may even reach *you*. Ah, what may it not do!” And the tears of weariness and perhaps of faithlessness came again; for faith will faint at times when sorely tried, and hope will droop its wing. And so Minnie, alone once more, laid down her head in bitter sadness upon the cushions of the sofa; but gradually the tears came welling up less freely, the eyelids wearily closed, and a soft, sweet sleep sealed the severely-taxed senses:—“So He giveth His beloved sleep.”

When she again awoke, the dawn of a winter’s morning was stealing in between the parted curtains, and the monotonous splash and tinkle of rain-drops fell upon the window-panes, and beat upon the roof of the veranda without. Other sounds broke also upon her ear: the low, pleasant crackling of a renewed fire upon the hearth, the soft clink of

china and spoons, and the subdued tone of voices that mingled strangely and pleasantly with those sounds. "Where was she?" that was her first waking thought. And then the whole transaction of the past night flashed upon her. With a heavy sigh of renewed pain, she arose and looked around her.

It was morning—and what a morning! The sound of wind and rain without prevailed; within, the brightly gleaming fire. The cheerful aspect of the breakfast-service looked inspiring; but even its unwonted presence in the dining-room gave evidence to the deeds of the past night. At a little distance from the table, on which one of the servants was just placing the coffee-urn, with their backs towards Minnie, and their faces to the fire, stood two gentlemen, in low, but earnest conversation. She recognised them immediately—her cousin Edwin and Alex Campbell. She sprang eagerly towards them, extending both hands to her cousin, exclaiming, "Edwin, O Edwin!" and bursting into tears.

"Why, Minnie," he returned, "I thought you had a brave heart."

"My uncle,—surely you know, Edwin," she returned, in astonishment.

"Yes, he knows, Miss Rayton; knows what you do not,—for you have been sleeping for some hours,—that your uncle is better, has returned to consciousness, and there is every sign of his yet doing well." It was Mr. Campbell who spoke, and with a warmth and energy that betrayed his desire to allay

her fears and relieve her mind at once. How she blessed him for it! He was fully repaid by the smile that sprang to her lip and the light to her eye, and by the low toned, glad, but reverential "Thank God!" that escaped her lips as she clasped his outstretched hand.

"Have you been very much alarmed, Minnie," Edwin asked.

"It has been a fearful night—fearful!" said Minnie, the flush dying away from her cheek.

"Yes," said Mr. Campbell, gravely; "it has told sadly on your cousin, Mr. Edwin. If I might be permitted to advise, I should say she had better retire at once to her room, and get some good rest. When the mind is heavily taxed, the body generally takes revenge."

But Minnie would not hear of that. She went away indeed for a short time to her own room to refresh herself with a bath, and to pour out her burden of thanksgiving for her uncle's restoration. When she again entered the room, she found the gentlemen still awaiting her arrival, and she took her seat at the table in her fresh morning dress, looking pure and refreshed, though still bearing the impress of the night's sorrow and fatigue upon her.

"Where is Doctor Leigh?" she asked presently; "and when did you come, Edwin?"

"I came an hour ago," her cousin answered smilingly. "Doctor Leigh has gone to Clinton to see some patient there. He will be back as soon as possible."

"And can uncle be safely left?"

"Yes, for so short a time. He is so much better; but of course extreme quiet and care are necessary."

"And aunt, where is she?"

"In with father; he recognised her, and misses her if she is absent for a moment; so she will not leave him. Take some breakfast, Minnie, or you will not be able to help her."

There was hope then. While there is life there is hope; but something more of certainty lay in her cousin's words. How she blessed God for this spared life, and how she prayed that it might henceforth awaken to new purposes, new determinations, fresh resolves. As she sat, so quietly dispensing the breakfast requisites, scarcely tasting her own share, her heart was with her uncle, still earnestly in her mission, and meditating how she could best combat with the terrific foe that had wrought such evil in their pleasant household.

She went and stood at the window as they rose from breakfast. The gentlemen were discussing a subject outside her thoughts. She was uninterested, at least, at that time, in its detail, however heartily she might have engaged in it at another. The fast dripping rain saturating the garden walks, hanging like silver bells from the leaves and leafless branches, and falling in an indefinite number of globules in the many miniature lakes that the rain of the night had formed, were more congenial with her feelings. There was something sad in the sight of those leafless

branches, bare and dripping with the chilling rain, something desolate in the leaden hue of the sky that yet bore promise of more rain. Was it not very much like her present feelings, almost as hopeless; yet even as she thought that, there was a little bright shining visible through the heavy clouds, and gradually at the last, they disunited their leaden walls, and a few bright beams of coming sunrise shot cheerfully forth. It was no longer a hopeless-looking sky, and ought she not to take heart, too, and remember that though "with each life some rain must fall," yet still, that "behind the clouds the sun is shining."

"How faithless I am!" thought Minnie; "and the injunction is, 'Only believe.'"

"Miss Rayton, I advise you to take some rest to-day," said Mr. Campbell's voice at her side. "Spare your strength till it is more required."

She turned hastily round, and saw that her cousin had quitted the room. They were alone.

"I am more weary in mind than in body, Mr. Campbell," she replied sadly.

"I know it; but for the mind there should be rest. What is the injunction, Miss Rayton? 'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.' You need not,—it is unwise,—to try to bear the burdens yourself."

"Yes," said Minnie, musingly, "it is; and yet, sometimes there does not seem strength to cast."

"What say you to rolling the burden. I have

heard that advised as the easier way, when strength so fails that casting is impracticable."

Minnie smiled, but the tears stood in her eyes. "I think I know what you mean," she presently answered. "Yes, that will better suit the little strength I have. But, Mr. Campbell, there are some evils so great as to be absolutely crushing,—as to appear past redemption."

"To mortal powers and mortal vision ; but there is no limit to God's power. I need not remind you that the nations to Him are as a drop of a bucket. He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And is the heart of man beyond His influence ? Surely not."

"You encourage me very much," said Minnie, wiping away the tears that came spite of the encouragement. "I am ashamed of my lack of confidence and faith ; but the past night's experience has been so terrible. My poor uncle seems so entirely under the sway of this terrible evil, this dreadful plague, intemperance. You do not wonder at my trouble ?"

"I do not, indeed ; but I would not have you despair. There is one little proverb, Miss Rayton, we should all do well to remember—'He who prays despairs not.' When I came before day-break this morning, your uncle was still senseless, and I confess then I had my fears for his recovery. It seemed terrible that he should pass away in such a state,—pardon unsought, unfound ; but now, life is spared, and who can tell for what purpose ! Miss Rayton, I think, you have every reason to feel encouraged ; at

the same time you must take care of yourself, spare your own energies for future service,—your future work requires strength. I am no medical practitioner, but a thoroughly practical man, and can perfectly understand that the mental strength is often dependent on the physical. Will you take my advice, and rest?"

"I will, if I find I can," returned Minnie, gratefully. "Are you going home?" she continued, for he had taken up his hat as he spoke.

"Yes; for the present I am of no use here. I will come again this afternoon, and meanwhile I will send Helen to you, she is a good sick nurse, and may be of use to relieve your aunt while you both rest." He shook hands warmly, and went, but not without having left the influence of his strength upon his drooping companion. There are some natures whose very presence is invigorating and bracing, who throw off, as it were, scintillations of strength, and perhaps by that mesmerism with which some affirm we are plentifully charged, communicate power and confidence and renewed life by a mere word or action.

Minnie stood for some time after he had left, still thinking, but no longer hopelessly; the future was gilded with sunshine, even as the dark clouds were already dispersing before the rays of the material sun. She could not help feeling thankful there were still some brave, strong hearts in the world, and that the sympathy, the prayers of one such strong heart were hers.

She turned at last from the room to her uncle's chamber, softly, and stealthily ; she stood within the doorway ; her eyes fell upon her aunt meekly seated beside the bed, watching with an intense look of fond solicitude the every movement of her husband. Yes ; a great change had passed over him. He was greatly altered even in that short time, yet his failing senses had returned, and hope, amidst all the lines of care was now legibly written on her aunt's face. She had not entered, but still stood unseen upon the threshold, when she felt herself suddenly but gently drawn back into the hall, and Doctor Leigh stood by her side.

"Pardon the liberty, Miss Rayton," he exclaimed in a low tone ; "but I fear the least excitement for my patient. He has mentioned your name two or three times, and appears quite disturbed when he does so. It may be that at present your presence may prove too exciting : he is beginning to remember the events previous to the fit. It is a good sign, but you will perceive the necessity for keeping him calm as possible."

"Oh, certainly, doctor !" said Minnie in alarm ; "I would not for anything excite him."

"I can comprehend very well how it is your presence is likely to do so," said the doctor, smiling. "Your mission has not proved idle. I sincerely hope it will reward your care, and shall not be the least surprised that it does ; at any rate, *extreme* abstinence will be an absolute necessity for some time to come."

"And you think I had better keep away from the room?" Minnie asked, a flush of hope starting into her face at his words.

"At present, if you please. Just consider yourself under ban for a time," he added, laughing, "and make use of your liberty by getting refreshment and rest yourself. I must not have you for my patient; but I foresee I shall, if you do not take more care of yourself."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MINNIE'S COADJUTOR.

HELEN CAMPBELL and her brother were valuable auxiliaries in the sick chamber for the next few days. Minnie was still excluded, for though her uncle had asked for her more than once, the doctor would not remove the ban, and she had nothing to do but submit to his orders.

In a very short time, however, her powers were called into requisition. Intelligence of their father's illness had been at once despatched to her cousins, and as John was stationed much nearer home than his brother, he was the first to arrive. He came an evening or two after the seizure, when Mr. Rayton was slowly rallying from the effects of the fit. The doctor was just leaving Glen Lewin, as he rode up—they dismounted at the gate, and shook hands.

"I am happy to be able to tell you your father is better, Mr. John," said Doctor Leigh, cheerfully. "The stroke has proved less serious than at first appeared; still, the greatest care must be taken, the least excitement prevented, or this attack, though slight, may only prove premonitory."

"I did not think my father was a subject for apoplexy," said John. "What is the cause of the attack?"

"Why," said the doctor, hesitatingly, "your father is by no means abstemious, Mr. John—to give it no harder name. At his time of life, with his tendency to corpulency, he is a very likely subject indeed for such attacks without strict abstinence."

"You were present, I think, at his seizure; had you no apprehension?"

"I cannot say I had none," replied the doctor, uncomfortably; "but I was present as his guest, and not as his medical adviser: a great distinction you perceive."

"Certainly, certainly," was John's reply; but there was a satirical smile on his lip as he spoke. "Of course it was not your duty or office to *warn*." And raising his hat, he passed on, leaving Doctor Leigh to ride off and digest his last words as he might.

"What does the boy mean?" he asked himself, as he put his horse upon its mettle. "And what does Minnie Rayton mean also, by her frequent reproachful glances. If I undertook to warn my friends of sickness, I should have my hands full enough, and no thanks into the bargain." But his ride into Clinton, nevertheless, was not a very pleasant or easy one. Conscience will prick, and sharply too, in spite of our efforts to dull and deaden its poignancy; and the doctor knew very well that Mr. Rayton's attack of apoplexy was no surprise to him; that all the evening he had detected premonitory symptoms, and that certainly his duty as a friend should have induced him to have given the word of warning, whether it

was heeded or not. Indolence rather than apathy had withheld the word, and that indolence, his be-setting sin, had nearly deprived Glen Lewin of its master.

"My poor Minnie," said John, after he had been an hour or two in the house, had visited his father, seen his horse carefully tended for the night, and enjoyed a very snug *tête-a-tête* tea with his cousin, "you are experiencing some of the ills of Glen Lewin. It is a nice place, and would be a pleasant home, but for one thing."

"So it would, John," said Minnie, warmly; "but that one thing spoils all."

"Do you know, Minnie," John presently continued, "I've thought a great deal of the talks you and I used to have about temperance, since I've been up at the station yonder. I thought it all over by myself first, till, as I suppose you would say, the fire burnt within me, and would find its way out. I had no one to talk to but my mate, Jack Jones, the shepherd, but I suppose I talked to him to some purpose, for one night he hunted up a small cask of beer, and several bottles of spirits from the corner of the hut, and before I knew what he was about, he carried them all outside, staved in the barrel, and smashed the bottles to shiverines. 'Hallo, Jack,' said I, 'are you mad?' 'Not I,' he cried; 'but I'm a temperance man for the future. So help me, if another drop of the blessed stuff ever passes my lips again.'"

"Well done—well done, Jack! and bravo, John!

Why, you're a most effective temperance advocate," cried Minnie, in a state of great excitement. "You must have pleaded the cause well."

"Why, as to that," said John, funnily, "I just repeated your own words, used your arguments, and gave your illustrations; he had it second rate, that's all."

"And you really believe that the man is sincere?"

"I don't see why he shouldn't be; he is a most persevering fellow, determined too, and never was a great drinker. Now and then, like the rest of the men, he would ride into Adelaide with a year's wages, and in two or three days he would run through the whole, get 'gloriously drunk'—to use his own words—and then come back penniless to the station, and patiently plod on another year, at the end of which the same conduct would be repeated. He says he now sees the folly of it; it has cost him one sweet-heart, but it never shall again. He talks of getting married when he takes his next wages, and bringing up his wife to be hutkeeper. I hope he will; it will be better for me, as well as for himself, to have a woman about the place."

"I should like to see this Jack," said Minnie, eagerly.

"Ah, never fear; you will. He intends to call here on his way to Adelaide, and get his name down in your pledge-book. He says he shan't rest till he does."

"I honour him for it. Well done, Jack! But, my

dear John, you won't let his name take precedence of yours, will you?"

"I don't see why I should, if it will do any good. I never cared for drink; but I do think, Minnie, you have the right of it. I'm not over old, but even I have seen a good deal of misery caused by intemperance—or, there—drunkenness. Why should I mince the word, though Dr. Leigh does? I'm sure it has caused evil and unhappiness enough in our family."

"Then you will sign? Ah, John, I am so glad."

"Yes, I'll sign. I've promised Jack that we will sign together; but mind you, Minnie, my word would have been quite as binding. If I had resolved to abstain, not a drop would I have touched, sign or no sign."

She let him have his say, too glad at heart at her success to cavil about minor matters. Was not God already blessing her mission? Could she not rejoice over these first fruits accorded her? And had she not encouragement to hope for the future? She felt she had, indeed. Towards John she had always looked hopefully. She had believed that at some future period he might take a stand, and proclaim himself openly on her side, but her most sanguine expectations had not looked for such results as these. And she blessed her heavenly Father for having bestowed upon her more than she had asked, thus abundantly encouraging her trust in His word.

"I would sign now, Minnie," said John, rising to

retire for the night, "had I not promised Jack that we would sign together. But you need not be afraid; my word is pledged, and that is as sure as my bond. After what I have seen and heard here of the effects of inebriety in my poor father, rest assured I shall not be easily shaken."

"I am not a bit afraid for you, John," replied Minnie, confidently.

"You shall have no reason to be. I am getting thoroughly sickened of this state of things, and for my part I heartily wish every cask and bottle at the bottom of the sea. If you could only induce father to wish so too, Minnie! for when he gets over this bout, if he turns too and drinks again, I am afraid it will be worse than before."

The "sickness was not unto death." Minnie had occasion to rejoice over the spared life, and hope for the future. Many days passed away, and then the master of Glen Lewin left his room, a sadder and a sobered man. But how long this state of things would continue—whether with returning health and strength there would be a return of the cravings of unnatural appetite, a returning desire for the prohibited stimulants,—was a matter for fear and doubt.

Minnie had gradually been reinstated into her usual offices. The first interview with her uncle was a painful one, and tears started into her eyes at his first words.

"Minnie, my child, you need not look so upbraidingly at your old uncle; he has suffered enough."

She could not answer him for a moment, excepting by silent caresses, and then she whispered in his ear, "I thank God every day for sparing you to us."

After that first interview, he seemed to like her about him—like to have her waiting upon him. She was very glad, for it relieved her aunt greatly, and enabled Helen Campbell to return home, where her presence was much required.

"You will have plenty to do now, dear Minnie," she said at parting. "A great deal rests upon you, and your utmost vigilance will be needed. Alex says that Doctor Leigh tells him that the strictest sobriety will be necessary for some time; that a return to former habits will soon bring a return of apoplexy, and most likely prove fatal."

"Has he told this to my uncle?" asked Minnie, in dismay.

"I do not believe he has the moral courage to do it," replied Helen, contemptuously. "I have no sympathy with a man who can see another in danger—a danger that might by an easy course of action be averted—and give no sign. To me it seems the same as being accessory to a murder, deliberately to watch another quaff a cup of poison, and to make no effort to stay the madman's arm."

"Yes," said Minnie, "in the light we view it; Doctor Leigh thinks differently."

"He professes to think differently. I don't see how he can."

"Well," replied Minnie, hesitatingly; "he does not

take the same strong view of intoxicating drinks as we do ; he does not see the harm in them we do."

"In your uncle's case he does, at any rate ; he has said so ; and you remember that he confessed the use of ardent spirits was not only the cause of Ben Wayte's accident, but retarded his cure."

"Yes, in that case very likely, because the facts are palpable enough ; but in other cases he prescribes both brandy and wine ; so that he must believe there is some good in them. I should not like to think Doctor Leigh so utterly void of principle as to administer what he believes injurious. Surely that would tell against his own interests—against his own successful practice."

"Take care, dear Minnie !" said Helen archly. "I did not think Doctor Leigh would have a pleader in you."

"Nor has he," said Minnie, slightly colouring. "I have perhaps been inclined to think too harshly of him with respect to my uncle ; but if in some respects he has done wrong, we must at least give him his due. He has been most attentive and kind and skilful all throughout poor uncle's illness ; even you must confess that."

"Yes," said Helen, smiling a little contemptuously ; "it was all the amends he could make, Minnie. But, after all, it is a poor thing, first to make the wound, and then apply the plaster."

"But Doctor Leigh did not make the wound."

"The equivalent to that he did, for he did not try

to prevent it. But I suppose that would have been too much to expect from one of his profession. I wouldn't have a brother of mine living on the sickness and accidents of his neighbours for worlds."

"Now, Nelly, you are positively unjust," laughed Minnie. "Such a sweeping charge against a profession, without which we couldn't possibly get along—a most disagreeable profession, too; it is well, in my opinion, any one can be found to undertake its duties."

"And its emoluments, eh, Minnie? Mind you don't participate in them in the future, and I shan't care;" and with a warm kiss and a saucy shake of the head, Helen put her pony into a canter, and went.

Had Doctor Leigh indeed not the moral courage to do the right thing, and positively forbid the poison that would rob her uncle of life? She could not believe it; Helen must be prejudiced, but she would soon know; and so when he next came—when, as usual, he entered the parlour before seeking his patient, he found Minnie alone, quietly waiting for him, and working by the fire.

She looked up as he entered, and rose to offer him a chair. He was nothing loth to take it; the comfortable room, with its bright fire and pleasant companionship, was very inviting, after a long, cold, dreary ride—the last item, perhaps, the most inviting of all. Doctor Leigh had discovered that the rides to Glen Lewin far from detracted from the "ease" he so much courted, for if the road itself proved disagreeable, the end of the ride was ample compensation.

Minnie could not be quite insensible that she had something to do with the pleasure the doctor seemed to experience in his frequent visits to Glen Lewin. She knew that he liked her society, but that she partly attributed to the fact of their former acquaintance on the sea, and partly that he had not much lady society at Clinton of the kind he preferred ; and she knew him to be rather fastidious in his likings. Still, the look of extreme satisfaction that gleamed in his eyes as he took the seat she offered him, at the same time resuming her own, brought a little answering flush of colour to her cheek that was very pretty but rather embarrassing. She hastened to give him the benefit of her thoughts, and to dissipate his, which she feared were not quite what she desired.

" Doctor Leigh, my uncle seems very much better—very much better ; so much better, indeed, that I shall begin to fear for him again. You think it would be injurious for him to resume the use of wines or spirits, do you not ? "

" Certainly," replied the doctor, positively raising his eyebrows in surprise. " Why, surely, my dear Miss Minnie, you are not contemplating administering such nostrums, you of all others ? "

" No, indeed, not in my senses, doctor ; I have not altered a whit from the Minnie Rayton of old. All I want to know is this : is my uncle aware of the ban you have placed upon these things ? Does he know they would prove poison to him ? Have you told him so ? "

"I have forbidden their use during his illness, that you know," said the doctor, gravely.

"But, suppose he considers himself sufficiently restored? Suppose that feeling himself nearly well, this craving returns for these forbidden liquors: what then?"

"He must not have them," was the curt reply.

"Doctor, will you tell him this? He will take it better from you than from us, I am sure of that," said Minnie, pleadingly. "If it is likely to be so deadly in his case, he ought to know; just tell him how it is likely to prove, and the consequences of transgressing."

"Frighten him thoroughly, eh?" laughed the doctor. "You are determined to make me your auxiliary, whether I will or not, Miss Minnie."

"I should be very glad if you could see the evil of drinking these poisons as I do, doctor," Minnie replied; "you would not then countenance their use, for I know you care little for them yourself."

"I care nothing for them, Miss Rayton, absolutely nothing. It would be no privation to me if I never tasted another drop of either wine or spirit. But I cannot influence other men's tastes; and after all, where moderation is used, it forms just an excuse for friendly, social intercourse. It is the abuse that is the evil."

"Ah, doctor, you will never be convinced, I see. Friendly, social intercourse! was it this the other night?"

"The abuse was present; you forget."

"But is it not almost always so? Are not these social gatherings, many of them, spoilt by the wine and spirits? Does not sense become too frequently nonsense under their influence?"

"Ah, well,—

'Convince a man against his will,
He's of the same opinion still.'

And so I suppose it is with me," laughed the doctor. "You must try again, Miss Minnie," he continued, rising. "I shall tax all your powers before I become a thorough convert."

"I don't despair," replied Minnie, laughing also. "But, doctor, do not forget; be candid and open with my uncle, will you not?"

"I have promised, Miss Minnie; your wish is law; and after having done your will, as I have a spare half hour, will you give me a little music?"

"With pleasure, doctor," was Minnie's reply as he withdrew.

CHAPTER XIX.

EDWIN'S COMMISSION.

MR. RAYTON gradually returned to his former state of health, or nearly so. He had suffered too severely to have regained the strength he had before enjoyed. In some respects he was better, for the remedies used had considerably reduced him, and the strong man had learnt in a few days something of his weakness. He was graver and quieter, too; and whether it was that Dr. Leigh had really fulfilled his promise, and warned him of the consequences of excess, or of a return to his old habits, or whether his own good sense prevailed, and pointed out the proper course—certain it is, that though he did not, as Minnie had hoped, relinquish entirely all intoxicating liquor, he evidently limited himself to a small and regular quantity, vigorously pushing away the bottle as soon as the prescribed amount was taken.

This state of things was better than nothing, but it did not satisfy Minnie. She feared, and justly too, that it was but opening up the way for the resuming of past habits. If she could only convince her uncle of this, if she could only induce him to renounce, now and for ever, the enemy to his health and peace!

“Why, Minnie, child,” he exclaimed one day in his old laughing manner, “you look as suspiciously at my glass as if it contained poison.”

"So I think it does, uncle; it seems nothing else but poison to me, and I am sure it is so to you."

"Pshaw! not the drop I take. Why, child, I have been used to it all my life; it's not likely I could give it up now altogether."

"Not though it injures you, uncle? Think how nearly it cost your life!"

Something like a shudder passed over his frame. He did not answer her for a minute. "Yes," he presently slowly exclaimed; "yes, it *was* a near touch. You nearly lost your uncle, Minnie. Well, I am a fool sometimes; I was a fool that night, worse than a fool—a madman; but I don't mean to play either fool or madman again."

"But is it not better to keep out of the way of temptation, uncle?" asked Minnie, with a winning smile that disarmed resentment, if any was excited by her words. "Don't you think that if you never tasted wine or spirits or anything of the kind, if you never allowed them near you, the desire for them would soon wear out?"

"My dear little Minnie, you are a subtle reasoner," he returned laughing rather uneasily; "but I don't see the need for such self-denial on my part. I don't see that a moderate use of these things does, or can do, anything but good; the excess is bad, I know that as well as you—better, for I have experienced it; but then I don't mean to exceed."

"I know you don't," replied Minnie, with tears in her eyes. "I know you don't mean to exceed, but

oh, I am so afraid that old habits will prove too strong for you ; that some day in one moment they may overcome you, when you may least expect, and that then I shall lose my uncle ! O uncle John," she exclaimed, rising in the excitement of that fear, and throwing her arms round him, "do give me leave to throw all this poison away. Just try it for six months, sign for only six months' abstinence. You would never want to drink again, I'm sure !"

"No, no, my girl ; I'll try my way first ; if it don't succeed, may be I'll try yours," and that was all Minnie, with her tearful eyes and earnest pleading tones, could obtain ; but, as we have said before, it was better than nothing, and she had to rest content with this promise for the present. Meanwhile, she continued her vigilant though covert watch, and at present there was no sign of her uncle's departing from the rule he had laid down for himself. She was thankful for that, though the continual dread was trying in the extreme, not only to herself, but to her aunt.

For a few weeks John had gone back to the station, it was not very possible for him to remain at home longer, and there was now little need that he should, since his father had so far recovered. He went, assuring Minnie that when he returned again, Jack, the shepherd, would accompany him, and that then she might produce her pledge-book to some purpose. "That need not prevent your getting as many signatures as you can beforehand, you know, Minnie," he laughingly exclaimed.

"No, indeed; rest assured I shall do all I can in that way, and remember, Mr. John, I rely upon your help. Bring as many as you can with Jack; there is unfortunately plenty of space in my book, and there are plenty of spare cards."

"The mission moves on but slowly," sighed Minnie to herself, as he rode off; "but sometimes small beginnings make great endings, and it is wrong to despair."

Edwin did not remain at home either, but he frequently paid short visits, so that his absence was not so much felt. He shared Minnie's anxiety about his father very evidently, and the tone of his voice, even more than his words, expressed it, as on every fresh visit he exclaimed—

"Is all right, Minnie? No fear of another outbreak?"

"There always will be fear; at least, I shall always fear, Edwin," she replied one day. "While the wine or the spirit-flask have any place on the table, there must be cause for fear."

"In this case I must admit that you are right," he returned. "You would turn your pledge-book to some account if you could induce father to sign; it is for such men as he is that total abstinence is good, and, perhaps, necessary, simply because they are morally weak."

"I have tried, and failed," said Minnie sadly; "but I don't intend to give up on that account; and Edwin, I am daily, hourly watching, but it is sad work."

"Sad work, indeed; but nothing like the slavery poor Edith has to endure; nothing like the martyrdom that is her daily portion." He paused for a moment, and then more quietly went on: "You told me, Minnie, to come to you when I wanted help: will you give it now?"

"Most certainly I will, with pleasure; what can I do?"

"Well," said Edwin, with a slight unbending of reserve, "the house I told you was building is up now, finished, and I have a good deal of furniture in it from Adelaide; but there are many little matters that women understand best. Will you give me a day, just look over my things, and see what's wanting?"

"Willingly, Edwin," said Minnie, with a little hesitation; "but I have not a great amount of experience. I suppose I have not been brought up a very good housekeeper, though dear auntie is teaching me now. Should you mind very much if I take Helen Campbell with me? If we could consult together it would be all the better for your house."

"I would rather have yourself; but I don't know that it signifies, and I certainly wish everything to be really nice for Edith's reception; she has had enough hardness to endure, poor thing. Her father drinks more than ever; it's frightful to leave her in his power."

"Why need you, Edwin? Surely we can see to this at once."

"Can you go to-morrow, Minnie? If Helen goes with you, I need not. The house is just four miles

from Belmont. I shall give you both directions and keys, then you can do as you will."

And so it was decided. Minnie rode over to Campbell Dell that afternoon, and enlisted Helen's services. She entered heart and hand in the work, and was delighted to join her, and then having obtained a rather reluctant permission from Edwin to tell the secret to his mother, after many tears and expressions of surprise at the unexpected secret, Mrs. Rayton proved a valuable ally, suggesting already many things, and desiring Minnie to bring home a perfect copy of their list when she returned.

"Poor boy!" she sighed, "he will be more domesticated when he is once married; it's best, I do not doubt."

It was a bright, bracing day for a ride; cold, but with a pleasant sunshine, and a dryness in the air and absence of clouds that prognosticated well for their day's work. They had a long ride before them, but they carried light hearts, and it proved a very delightful one. The old gums were green and heavy with foliage. So were the cherry and blackwoods, and the very wattles lifted up their glossy leaves and caught the sunbeams, till in the distance their tiny new leaflets glowed like their own future golden blossoms. The birds were blithe and gay. The robin with his crimson vest glanced here and there on tree and fence like a living gem. The frogs sent up their chorus from the creek, rejoicing in the warm sunbeams; and the grass was getting greener and greener, Minnie

declared, every time she went out. Flocks of parrots flew from bough to bough, or fence to fence, sometimes sweeping the grass even at the horse's feet. Little flowers, blue and pink and yellow, modestly lifted their pure faces to the warm sunshine. The ground in most places was dry and hard, for the two or three days' fine weather and sunshine had drunk up all superfluous moisture, and left firm footing. Minnie recollected most of the way; she had traversed it as far as Belmont with Alex Campbell on her memorable journey for her pledge-book. Belmont seemed quite familiar to her as they rode through the outskirts of its township. There lay the manse, but they kept that in the distance, having no desire to be questioned, even by the pastor of Belmont, as to their destination. Belmont itself soon lay behind them as they pressed their horses gaily forward.

"That must be the house," exclaimed Minnie at length, after another four miles had been traversed; and she drew up her horse as she spoke at a slip panel at the right hand side of a long road, and pointed to a new building, round which still lay heaps of stone and broken bricks and lime, the remnants of the work itself. "This must be the place, Helen; it is just as Edwin described it."

"I believe it is," returned Helen, springing lightly to the ground, and securing her horse to the fence. "Yes; see, that is the padlock to the slip panel. Now, will the key open it?"

"I thought so," said Minnie, as the released chain

fell down, and the panels were easily lifted from their places. "Now we will lead the horses straight on, and fasten up the rails again. Edwin told me we should find a stable and hay, so that is the next thing we must do."

The stable soon made itself visible just behind a clump of wattles not very far distant; and there, leaving the horses to luxuriate over a plentiful manger of hay, the two girls went on merrily to the house.

It was a good-sized stone building, containing apparently half a dozen rooms, put together in very good style, and forming the nucleus of a future substantial dwelling, and bearing promise, even now, when completed, of wearing quite an ostentatious appearance. There were no steps to ascend, but the hall-door was large and even handsome, and the windows on either side were broad and lofty and well finished. There was no veranda, but one was evidently in progress, and stepping daintily through the heaps of rubbish, Minnie put the key in the door, turned it, and the next moment they stood together in the well-lighted hall, their gay laughter ringing through the empty house as they ran about from room to room amid the scattered groups of furniture,—abundant enough, no expense had been spared, but as oddly arranged as ever unsophisticated hands could arrange anything.

"We shall have to take another day here, I can see," said Minnie, when their merriment had sufficiently subsided to enable them more leisurely to view

things. "Edwin said he had had the place well cleaned, and so he has; but everything else is 'out at elbows.' We want a man here to lift the furniture, and our Bessy to help to arrange it. I am sure I wonder how Edwin has managed so well as he has without help."

"We will take off our habits, at any rate, and do what we can, Minnie," said Helen. "If I am right in my conjectures, and Edith Manville is the lady, depend upon it the circumstances are urgent. Such a father as she has, poor girl! it would be a mercy to take her from. Still it is strange that Edwin should withhold her name."

"Open the lunch basket, and let us sit down first, Nelly. My ride has made me hungry; we will work afterwards. Now tell me all you know about Edith, for I only know this, that Edith is her name, that she is very lovely, and a lady, and that she has a brutal—a drunken father, from whom Edwin is in a hurry to rescue her."

"The sooner the better, if I am right. The Edith that I know, or rather have heard about, lives five miles beyond Clinton. Her father has a school, but the greater part of the teaching falls upon his daughter, on whom also devolves all the household work; and she is a little bit of a creature, and as you say, a sweet and lovely girl, and good as lovely. Her mother died long ago broken-hearted, and her only brother ran away some months since, unable to endure his father's violent treatment. He is very

seldom sober, and but for Edith, would have lost his school over and over again. But the worst item in the account is the style of company he brings home at night, the drinking that rouses these men to fury, or imbecile madness, or worse, and is the forerunner of everything bad. Poor Edith many times has had to jump out of the back window and run to a neighbour's house for protection. If I was Edwin I would not let her remain a day longer in such keeping."

"It must be the same; of course it is," said Minnie, excitedly. "Ah, let us do all that we can, Helen, to get the place ready for her. But Edwin need not wait. Why could he not bring her to our house? It seems fearful to leave her in such power."

Quick hands and an earnest purpose did wonders after that, both in arranging things and noting down fresh wants. The furniture, for the most part, was light and easily moved. The carpet—a handsome one—the exact size of the room, was readily spread; and chairs and tables and couches placed in appropriate positions. Even the very pretty cottage piano was found no difficult matter to raise just sufficiently for the carpet to be passed underneath.

What with lively words and merry laughter and bright anticipations, the two young ladies found their work, though rather fatiguing, very pleasant. The very thought of the change it would be to Edith, the presiding over this home of her own, with all its new, pretty furniture, its soft carpets, its comfortable

lounging chairs, and books, and music, the entire, the delightful change from what had been no home to her, but a dwelling of care, of dread, of shame, and sorrow, gave a zest to their exertions; and by the time Minnie's little golden monitor (her uncle's last kind gift) pointed to the hour of four, a very great revolution had been made in the interior of Rayton Grange, for so Edwin had laughingly named his house; and Rayton Grange it was likely to remain.

Having enjoyed a brief ablution, for which there were ample means provided, and brushed all the dust away from their hair, and resumed their habits, they stood together looking out of the window eating their last slice of cake, and examining the prospect without. Rather dreary now, certainly; the uncleared heaps of rubbish made it so. But Minnie's bright spirit looked forward to another state of things, to which she was fully warranted by a knowledge of Edwin's exceedingly orderly nature, and his great repugnance to the slightest disarrangement in his surroundings. She knew it would soon wear a different aspect then: the veranda finished, the disfiguring heaps carried away, a garden laid out and planted (there were some preparations for that already), and Rayton Grange would indeed be a lovely place. It was prettily situated, just on the slight slope of a gentle declivity, and here and there were magnificent gums and clusters of wattles, giving a park-like appearance to the whole. Hills, too,

were in the distance lighted up with rosy sunlight, and here and there were comfortable homesteads dotting the landscape, and in and out between the hills.

"It will look very lovely by-and-by, and I am glad of it for Edith's sake," sighed Minnie.

"And now, Minnie, if you have looked enough and dreamed enough, we must depart at once," said Helen. "The sun is setting in some very ominous clouds, and don't you hear how the wind is sighing through the she-oak near the window? These slender, fibrous leaves portend rain, and we shall have it before we can reach home, and a regular blow, too; see how the wind is increasing."

"Never mind," laughed Minnie; "we have accomplished a good day's work. I think Edwin will be pleased," and taking one final glance into every room, and making a few final notes, they locked up the doors securely behind them, and went out to the stable to their horses.

"It certainly looks very unprepossessing for a twelve miles' ride," said Minnie, as they cantered away at last from the slip panel. "How very rapidly the clouds have gathered! and I am sure I may congratulate myself on the secure fastening I have to my hat, if it is to continue to blow like this."

"This breeze is rather inspiring than otherwise," replied Helen; "and if we can only escape the rain it will be pleasant enough."

But before they had half terminated their journey,

the clouds thickened and parted, and down came the rain; not, indeed, in a heavy shower, but in a continuous drizzle, blown about in all directions by the wind, and very chilling and comfortless. It did little, however, to damp the spirits of the two girls, however much it did their riding habits. They rode on rapidly, now and then exchanging a word or laugh; but by the time they reached Campbell Dell, they were thoroughly soaked through. That was all speedily rectified; and Minnie, who had arranged to stay the night, finished up a very agreeable day by a very lively, pleasant evening with her firm friends, Alex, Helen, and Jessie.

CHAPTER XX.

EDWIN'S MARRIAGE.

EDWIN'S commission was faithfully fulfilled by his cousin, even to the minutest item; and out of it grew many pleasant rides backwards and forwards to and from Campbell Dell; for Helen Campbell felt almost as interested in the preparations as Minnie. During these visits, Campbell Dell grew less strange to Minnie, till at last she felt almost as thoroughly at home while seated in its pleasant parlour, now transformed by warm curtains and a ruddy fire into a wintry cozy nook, though still bright with its flowering shrubs and plants, in full hot-house beauty, —almost as thoroughly at home, we repeat, as the canary that daintily stepped from perch to perch, a very fairy of joy and beauty, gaily warbling at even. During those days, she became more familiar with the social and domestic life of the brother and sisters; became cognisant of the many little delicate acts of genuine kindness and politeness passing between them: trivial little acts, scarcely noticeable, and yet bearing upon them the very stamp of refinement, a sensitiveness to the feelings and wants and wishes, which can only spring from a loving heart. There was a beautiful bond of union between them, not only that of nature, and that was evidently very

strong, but the earthly ties were still further cemented by heavenly ones. They were alike bound to one country; and however diverse might be their earthly pathway, they knew that they had one common future meeting-point; and that once gathered there, parting would be over for ever. Jessie, with her bright, merry, mischief-loving spirit—the spirit of a bird on the wing—she, too, had turned, with all the warmth of her young heart, and found the feet of Jesus a sweet resting-place; and Helen had brought her sorrows there from early childhood, for many sorrows she had known, though, after all, the last was the heaviest to bear. She had yielded up her heart to Harry before she knew the evil habit that was sapping his very life. She could not take it back again, only her hand she firmly withheld. “For one twelve months let nothing intoxicating pass your lips, dear Harry,” she had tearfully said at their last meeting, “I shall have some hope of you then; and then I will be yours.” And so, with many promises he had gone away, resolved to do as she wished, and to gain his lovely bride. Alas for human stability! Resolutions, determinations, all faded before the first temptation, and Helen Campbell went on her way in sadness.

All Minnie's early prejudices against Alex Campbell had long since died out; but had any remained, those pleasant fireside conversations, the long evenings spent by herself and the sisters in needlework, for the Rayton Grange domicile were quite sufficient

to banish them entirely. She enjoyed those evenings exceedingly ; but they were not only pleasant to her, and not alone a joy to Helen and Jessie : the master of Campbell Dell was never so entirely himself as when she made one of the number ; and the look of extreme satisfaction which would gleam in his blue eyes when coming in tired from his work or ride, he found her established in his easy chair, from which he would in no wise permit her to stir, was edifying to behold. But these frequent meetings were not likely long to continue, after the end for which they met was accomplished. Edwin was impatient, and they had to call in more aid, till at last the final stitch was taken, the house visited for the last time, a respectable young woman established therein to take care of it, and to act as household servant on the arrival of its future mistress, and then all was pronounced complete.

"The worst of it is, our pleasant meetings are over," sighed Helen.

"Is there no one else that is going to be married, and whose sewing we might undertake?" exclaimed Jessie, playfully. "My dear Minnie, what shall we invent to get you to our house two or three times a week? We shall be lost without you."

"You must come all the more frequently to see me," laughed Minnie.

"Yes, all very well for us ; but, poor Alex ! is he to be left alone ? Besides it's not like having you all to ourselves, as we have done lately. I wish we could have you altogether !"

"Silly girl!" said Helen, colouring slightly; "your wishes and Minnie's may very widely differ; but I hope, Minnie," she added softly, kissing her, "you will not quite forsake the old Dell."

The evenings after that were many of them wet and stormy. Winter asserted its power still in spite of the almost spring-tide interval that had transpired. The rain came heavily down and refilled the creeks and flooded the hollows, and the wind howled through the trees and round the house as madly and furiously as though there had been no interval of rest and sunshine. During those evenings Minnie was of necessity a prisoner. There could be no more visits to or from the dwellers of the Dell; and so she made herself thoroughly contented with her music, her books, and her work, and the quiet companionship of her aunt.

Meanwhile her uncle had gradually recovered so much of his former health, thanks chiefly to the abstinence to which he had compelled himself, as to desire a return to some of his former active pursuits. Perhaps the fact that Edwin had relinquished his interest in the concern, and that lacking his son's supervision, his own became imperative, had something to do in urging him forward. Be that as it may, one of the first fine mornings that intervened amidst the stormy weather, he thought fit to take his departure for Adelaide, in spite of the protestations of both wife and niece, the only thing to which he would agree, being to call on Dr. Leigh as he passed through

Clinton, and if he considered he was trying his strength too early, to return at night.

"I wish you could do without going at all, dear Uncle John," said Minnie, in terror. "Could you not get Edwin to manage this business for you for once?"

"Nothing like doing one's own work, my girl!" said her uncle, holding her off, and laughing; "it's sure to be well done then. Besides, you women, when you once get a fellow on the sick list, think he is never to be out of leading-strings. Why I shan't know the use of my legs presently, if I stay at home much longer. What's the matter, Minnie? you look terribly frightened."

"Ah, uncle, you know. Have I not had reason? Have you not suffered enough—have we not all?"

"Can't you trust your uncle, Minnie?"

"Can he trust himself?" Minnie almost whispered, as she put her arm round his neck, and caressed away any harsh effects her words might produce.

"I think I told you I intended to play neither fool nor madman again, did I not?" he asked, half angrily, "Come, come, Minnie, you must be content with that answer; it's all I shall give you."

It was all she could get; and with fear and trembling she saw him drive away, for she felt she could not trust him; she scarcely believed he trusted himself. He went to Adelaide, for the day passed away and he did not return. Towards evening, the man who had accompanied him came back, bearing two

letters, one a hasty note to Mrs. Rayton from her husband, declaring the doctor's opinion, that he might safely proceed, and also his intention of returning home in a week. The other letter was for Minnie, and from her cousin Edwin. She read it in silence, and with flushing cheeks and sparkling eyes, and then handed it to her aunt.

"DEAR MINNIE,—I have just returned from a look at the Grange, and thank you very much for its completeness. I am sure my little Edith will some day thank you too. It is just ready in time, for I may as well tell you that our wedding must come off directly; and as father is away, if mother does not mind, I shall bring Miss Manville home to-morrow at eleven o'clock, and get you to ride out with us to the little Wesleyan chapel, half way to Clinton, which I dare say you remember. I have engaged the minister, the Rev. Mr. Pearce, to perform the ceremony.

"You will wonder, perhaps, that Edith consents to such a hurried wedding, but you will not wonder when I tell you that things have reached the climax. Manville's school no longer exists. The people refused to send their children to a man perfectly furious with drink. He has now been a week under the influence of delirium tremens, and in such a state of maddened fury, that he not only attempted his own life, but his daughter's too. I am determined no longer to have her exposed to such dangers. It was time this state of things had passed; and as I can only protect her to purpose when legally qualified,

I have succeeded in persuading her to this step at once. Dear Minnie, will you act a sister's part for her to-morrow ?

“ Your affectionate cousin,

“ In haste,

“ EDWIN RAYTON.”

“ Edwin is quite right—poor child ! poor child ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Rayton, her eyes running over with tears. “ It is time indeed that he took her away from such a home, if indeed she is to be his wife ; but it's so sudden—so abrupt.”

“ Only like Edwin, auntie,” said Minnie, laughing and throwing her arms round the drooping form, “ *better* a great deal than his going off to England without saying good-bye. You won't have that to dread when he is once married.”

“ No, love ; and I feel that it will be best for him. Boys won't always be tied to their mothers ; they will have wives. Yes, dear ; it's best, and this poor little thing, she needs our love and all we can give her, Minnie. You will go with them as they wish ? ”

“ Oh yes, aunt ; and there is nothing to prepare. You see there is a postscript :—‘ Wear your riding-habit, Minnie, Edith will be married in hers.’ ”

“ It seems strange, so strange,” said Mrs. Rayton, the tears coming again. “ My poor boy ! but it don't matter in the least if he is happy.”

“ I wonder what Edwin intends to do ? Will he take her home at once, or go a short time south ? I

should think home. And, O auntie, their house does look so nice, particularly now the veranda is finished, and most of the rubbish cleared away. It will be a nice place by-and-by."

It was no glad, bright sunshine that welcomed in the wedding day. The sky wore a dull leaden hue, but there was no rain; and the air, though cold and chill, was sweet and refreshing, and fragrant with many flowering shrubs. Minnie was up early, and brought the fairest, sweetest flowers she could find to fill the vases; her aunt meanwhile, from a very early hour, was deep in the mysteries of the pantry and kitchen, concocting unheard-of delicacies for the occasion, hurried as it was.

Besides these floral offerings, Minnie had nothing else to prepare. Various bridal gifts from her skilful fingers were awaiting the acceptance of the bride in her new home; and as hour after hour passed away, and eleven strokes at length sounded from the great clock in the hall, Minnie's cheek was pressed against the panes of glass in the window, commanding the best distant view of the road, in order to catch the first sight of the arrival.

The horses, a fleeting glimpse of the riders, a flashing gleam of a skirt, and then Minnie knew that in a moment more she should behold the veritable owner of the tress of hair, and of the sweet face in the locket. With a beating heart she called her auntie, and then scarcely less eager, scarcely less anxious, awaited the arrival of her cousins.

They were coming, not on horseback now, they had left their horses in the groom's care, and were walking slowly up the avenue that led to the house. Slowly, very slowly.

"Poor little creature!" thought Minnie. "How she must feel! how frightened she looks!" for she made more than one stop in the pathway, and it seemed to require all Edwin's persuading powers to get her on at all.

"Auntie, shall I go half way to meet them?"

"Yes, love, do; and I will welcome them at the door," said Mrs. Rayton, her true mother's heart yearning over her son's bride.

Gathering up her habit, Minnie went hurriedly forward to no formal introduction, none was needed. With outstretched arms she received the trembling little thing, and drew her towards her, kissing her warmly, and whispering, "I've loved you already for dear Edwin's sake;" and then relinquishing her to the tremblingly warm embrace of Mrs. Rayton, turned to Edwin, who heartily wrung her hands.

"Thank you, Minnie; poor Edith is as timid as a bird; she needs all your persuasive powers, all your encouragement. I am glad you are ready; we must not stay a moment. Come, come, mother," he continued, bending down, and evidently kissing her; "we must not have tears; Edie has shed enough this morning to banish all the sunshine."

She looked up with a reproachful glance at him, and then Minnie saw the same sweet face, only

sweeter for its expressiveness. The same lovely hair falling in soft curls, escaping from under the riding-cap, that had pleased her so in the locket. She was a little creature, slight and delicate, and looking even smaller in the closely fitting habit. The shadow of sorrow, her great sorrow, rested upon the white face, and there were tears in the soft eyes. No wonder, for hers had been a sad life; and how could she be a joyous, happy bride, when her father, like a madman, lay chained down to his bed, her only brother driven from his home, she knew not where.

"You will come again, my son?" said Mrs. Rayton, eagerly.

"Oh yes, mother, as soon as it is over," he whispered, and then he lifted Edith to her saddle, and sprung to his own, for Minnie was already seated, and the mother through very maternal tears stood watching their departure.

The little Wesleyan chapel half way to Clinton stood embowered by trees, and with a background of hills, now green with verdure. It was a simple wooden edifice, half wood, half mud, but scrupulously whitened, and with its simple little windows perfectly bright and clean. The door stood widely open, and tied to a fence close by were the horses belonging to the minister and his son, who were awaiting the arrival of the bridal party within.

Edwin drew Edith's arm closely within his own, as they left their horses, and Minnie took possession of the other trembling hand. And thus they

presented themselves before the communion rail, where the minister stood smilingly awaiting them. Something of the circumstances had been communicated to him, something of them had fallen to his knowledge in the course of his ministerial visits. No allusion to them was however made now, and the little group arranged themselves before the railing, the ceremony quietly proceeding, and in a very few minutes Edwin led back his fair bride to her horse, and as he lifted her to her saddle he tenderly and yet exultingly whispered, "Mine now, Edie—mine for ever, no earthly power can take you from me."

What a ride back to Glen Lewin they had! Just as they turned their backs on the little chapel, the sun burst through the veil of clouds, and then threw off on either side the rising mists that fled before its presence. What a joyous aspect it shed around it; how vividly green looked the grass; how the waters gleamed and danced in the creek they crossed; and how all the face of nature seemed to gladden before those soft, bright beams!

"You have the sunshine, after all, Edie," exclaimed Minnie, turning gaily back her head—for she rode a little in front of the bridal pair, judging rightly that Edie's composure would best recover so. "'Happy is the bride that the sun shines on.' You see even that is not withheld, as a bright omen for the future." And having succeeded in winning an answering smile from the sweet, sad lips of her new cousin, she can-

tered lightly onward ; only now and then stopping to exchange a word or laugh with the scarcely conscious pair, who sometimes were, she was disposed to think, almost inclined to ignore her existence ; so enrapt were they in one another's society.

No very stylish wedding-breakfast awaited them at Glen Lewin, but an excellent dinner prepared by loving hands ; and more tears were shed, followed by smiles, as the motherly arms of Mrs. Rayton caressed her new daughter. It was a quiet dinner, but a happy one ; and the four sat long over their dessert, chatting and forming pleasant plans for their future intercourse.

"Come, Minnie, break through prejudice for once," at last Edwin exclaimed, holding the decanter towards her empty glass. "You surely will drink to our health and happiness ?"

"In water, with pleasure," said Minnie, bowing smilingly ; and filling her glass, she gracefully complied with the custom in the crystal fluid.

"You set a bad example, I see," said Edwin, looking slightly annoyed ; for the glass he had filled for his bride was untouched ; and she raised a beseeching pair of eyes, quietly saying,—

"In water, Edwin."

"This once, then," he answered, and filled her glass from Minnie's water-flask. "You must not imitate Minnie's principles. She is a rabid abstainer."

But that name did not frighten Edith ; she turned a look of deeper interest on Minnie, as though she

liked her better for it. The next moment, as the memory of the wreck her father had become through contrary principles flashed across her mind, tears came to her eyes, driven back by violent effort.

"After all," said Edwin, "I don't know that it signifies much whether it is wine or water; the liquor has no influence on the wishes." But he nevertheless filled his own glass with wine, and drank it without speaking.

"You have decided to go straight home, then, Edwin," said his mother, tenderly, as they once more stood at the door at parting. "You are quite sure Maggie has everything in readiness; you should have good fires such weather as this, and the house so new."

"There have been good fires in all the rooms, mother, for a week past; and Maggie is quite ready, and expecting us." He bent to kiss his mother as he spoke. How she clung round his neck! How she watched him as he rode off with his young wife! A rival had sprung up to share the heart of her boy, yet for his sake she tenderly loved her.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE END OF LIFE.

MR. RAYTON came back no better for his trip to town, though not seriously worse. To Minnie he looked greatly changed since his illness ; his hair had begun to turn white ; and in the thick beard clustering round his chin were many grey hairs. His face looked worn and haggard ; more so, indeed, since his return from Adelaide, though his stay had not exceeded a fortnight. He was weak still, she soon saw that, by a tottering in the step that had once been so firm. But she noticed with terror, that since his return he no longer restricted himself to the quantity of wine or spirits he had taken since his illness ; that though he still allowed himself a comparatively small quantity at one time, the dose was more frequently repeated. What would the ending be ?

And so the winter wore on, and its storms gradually lost their fury ; the winds blew more softly, and tiny breezes, fresh with the perfume of spring's blossoms, succeeded. Sunshine each day becoming more fervid, awoke unnumbered flowers, and sent the murmuring waters of the creek like scattered diamonds over the stones, all bright with tiny scintillations. Minnie welcomed the spring like an imprisoned bird suddenly regaining its freedom. Her

pony was called into almost daily action. The Campbells often welcomed her presence; though Alex was not much the better for it, since her visits were generally in the day time, when he was either away upon his land, and among his men, or riding. She had also been several times to Rayton Grange, and there she was indeed a welcome guest. The young wife in the midst of her pleasant home and abundant leisure, had many lonely moments; for Edwin, though now he had a hearth of his own had in consequence become far more domesticated than he had ever been before, was still frequently and unavoidably absent; and Minnie's company was a great boon in his absence. Edith felt she could so entirely confide her sorrows to her, for she listened with so much interest and sympathy, evidently feeling so deeply on the subject, and pointing her so sweetly at the same time to the pure fountain of happiness and hope that no sorrows could ever dry up. Edith had indeed cause enough for sadness, though in her husband's presence she tried to hide its evidence, tried to mask her grief with a smile, that no shade of her care might darken his home.

Not even her husband, her pretty home, and the atmosphere of love that now surrounded her, could banish from her remembrance the wretched condition to which her father's sin had brought him,—the desecration of intellect, of talent, and of health. Whatever the evils he had wrought for her, he had wrought in his madness, that terrible mania—the mania of

strong drink ! but he was her father still. She could not forget her earlier days ; pleasant days they were, and a happy home was theirs then. How proud she used to be of her father ! how dear she thought him ! They were not rich even then, but comfortably off. Mr. Manville's talents found ample scope and ample compensation in writing for the daily press of Sydney ; and Edith and her brother shared the highest advantages of both school and home education. Manville was sober in those days—a *moderate* drinker ; seldom or never deviating from one fixed quantity. But, alas ! the poison is insidious ; and who that tampers with it shall certainly say, " I never shall exceed " ? A thousand times better put it from our sight ; a thousand times better to dash the bowl to the ground, than to sip the tempting draught that eventually may rob us of our reason, or send us to a drunkard's grave.

Minnie learnt that it was by little and by little that Edith's father had been drawn from the paths of sobriety ; and so insidiously did the poison work, he was scarcely aware of its evil tendency himself. Connected with the press, an accurate and clever reporter, he was thrown, by the very nature of his profession, into many convivial entertainments, where toast following toast was drunk in bumpers, and whole evenings were given up to the lord of misrule—to the worship of Bacchus.

Gradually the love of the kind of excitement produced by intoxicating drink grew upon him, became

necessary to him; and as it did so, he began by neglecting his home, and spending even his leisure hours abroad. Now and then most grievous reports reached the ears of the drooping wife; and the little home became no longer a happy one. The blight had begun to work; Manville ceased to be the successful writer he once had been. He made many mistakes in his reports, and was again and again reprimanded, and eventually dismissed altogether. Madman as he had become—for drink removed every spark of reason from his brain while under its influence—he now drank with redoubled ardour; and as a natural consequence, his once happy, peaceful home became the scene of brutal violence, and his fair little wife gradually sunk beneath the weight of his cruelty and ill-treatment.

For a time, her death aroused some feelings of compunction and shame in his breast; and he abstained almost entirely for several months from every kind of intoxicating drink. During that time he left Sydney; and taking his son and daughter with him, sailed for South Australia, and opened a licensed school in the district adjoining Clinton. Here he had been for some time, till his folly again became visible. Invited out and made much of, admired and flattered for his talents, ability, and above all, his sociability, temptation was constantly thrown in his way, and the *South Australian vintage* became his bane. It was not at the public-house, not at the houses of friends—or rather those who professed themselves

friends—that he was once more drawn into his fatal vice; nor was it with either spirits or malt liquor that he was enticed; but with another more insidious poison—the production of those vineyards. New wine, almost fresh from the vat, was often forced upon him as harmless, when in reality it was maddening in its influence, and shortened the lives of all that drank it. Ah! who can tell the depth of misery this universal wine-making has accomplished in our southern land! How many happy households have been ruined, and can date their ruin to the *first cask of their own wine*! That wine was the ruin of Edith's father. Easily procured, at a nominal price and in any quantity, he drank it all day long, and became once more a madman; till at last, he attempted to take his daughter's life and his own.

“Oh Minnie!” Edith one day exclaimed through her tears, “how can I help being disgusted with what has ruined my father! I cannot—no I cannot—even to please dear Edwin, touch intoxicating drink. It is the only thing he is displeased with me for. And yet it has cost me so much, and has caused such misery in my family, that I tremble whenever I see the decanters on the table.”

“Have you told Edwin this?”

“Oh yes; but he only laughs at me, and says I have been taking lessons of you who are rabid on the subject. Alas! I have taken lessons at a more practical school, and have reason enough to detest wine.”

"Does Edwin insist on your taking what you dislike?"

"No; he does not go quite so far as that. He says I can do as I like, though it is very silly to refuse a good thing because some choose to drink to excess; but I can see it vexes him. He does not like my trembling, or seeming frightened at the wine on the table. But then, Minnie, I can so well remember the time when father drank no more than dear Edwin—when he used to argue too exactly as Edwin argues. You do not wonder at my trembling, do you?"

"No, indeed; I tremble too. I would give anything if Edwin would have done with *moderation*, for in my opinion there is but one step from that to *excess*."

"Not but that Edwin is a far firmer character than poor father ever was," said Edith, eagerly. "I do not think, or fear, Minnie, that he is in danger; only I should be happier, much happier, if he would but sign, and allow me to do so too. I had hoped too—hoped so much for dear father, when he gets over this illness, this fearful, fearful illness—that my marriage might perhaps tend to draw him away from bad companions, that dear Edwin might induce him to give up drinking. But he never will while the wine stands on the table."

"No," said Minnie, sadly; "his word would want the power of practice. Well Edith, dear, we must hope and pray, even for this."

Though there was no longer occasion for his

medical services, Dr. Leigh still paid friendly visits to Glen Lewin; and when he did not come himself, various remembrances from his hands came instead, that served to keep him pretty constantly before the minds of the dwellers at Glen Lewin. Sometimes it was a choice plant for Mrs. Rayton's garden, or rare flower seeds; sometimes game, the result of a day's shooting, for Mrs. Rayton's particular behest; more frequently still, some interesting magazine, some new book or popular piece of music, for Minnie. These latter gifts were generally followed by his own presence; so necessary did it become to learn how the books were appreciated, or to hear the sweet sounds of Minnie's piano, and the new rendering of the melody under her touch. Whatever the pretext, it was evident enough that Dr. Leigh found Glen Lewin a very attractive spot, and that the little coterie of scandal-mongers, the denizens of every country township, had already given him the fair Minnie Rayton for a bride, though the fair Minnie herself was among the last who deemed such a thing possible. If Mr. Rayton had any thoughts upon the subject, or suspected there was any latent cause for all these friendly actions and visits, quite independent of his own attractiveness, he said nothing, contented probably with knowing that the doctor's practice was rapidly enlarging, that his fame was spreading in every direction, and that already he was standing well with his banker, and that so far as outward appearances went he was a most eligible

match for any girl. And so the doctor quietly continued his visits, unmolested by interference, but receiving no warrant from anything in Minnie's manner for progressing one step nearer to another state of things, supposing he desired it, which the gossips of Clinton most positively asserted that he did.

From time to time, through Dr. Leigh, Minnie heard tidings of Edith's father. He was indeed under his medical treatment, for much as Edwin abhorred his character, he could not see his wife's father perish for lack of attention. But from the first the doctor declared it to be a hopeless case, and that sooner or later the termination must be death. It seemed hard thus coolly to resign a fellow-being to his sins and their consequences; and Minnie felt, that if indeed he must die, some effort must be made for his eternal welfare. She did not rest in the thought, but acted upon it.

"Dr. Leigh," she said one day, when for a few moments they stood together on the veranda, looking at the progress of a new and curious creeper that was climbing one of the pillars—a slip of his own presenting—"is Mr. Manville still violent—still suffering from delirium?"

"No," said the doctor; "that is nearly past, but the depression, the exhaustion, is terrible; he cannot survive long."

"Do you think it would be possible for me to see him?" asked Minnie quietly.

"My dear Miss Rayton, what could *you* possibly

do? I can assure you the poor fellow's hours are numbered; nothing can be done to save him," replied the doctor, smiling at her question.

"I am not thinking of that, doctor," replied Minnie. "I believe you have done all you can for him. I do not doubt your skill, but this life is not all."

"Oh, surely," said Doctor Leigh, with a sceptical smile still coiling the corners of his mouth. "Shall I send for a clergyman? I did not think of that."

"Will you take *me* there, doctor?"

"I will take you anywhere you wish, my dear Miss Minnie, with very great pleasure, but I would rather take you anywhere else."

"But there would be nothing improper in my going, would there? You say he is quiet and free from delirium?"

"Oh yes. I have no fear for anything of that kind; that phase of his disease has passed. But you will needlessly distress yourself, I am afraid. I would rather you did not do that."

"If that is all, and you do not mind the trouble of escorting me, I must really get you to do it, doctor," said Minnie, smiling. "When can you go? I can meet you in Clinton."

"I would gladly ride out and escort you all the way," replied the doctor, in somewhat vexed tones, "but unfortunately my patients are very numerous just now, and there are some urgent cases that I dare not neglect. I intend to see Manville, however, to-morrow, and if you will honour me so far as to ride

into Clinton, I shall be happy to take you the rest of the way."

Minnie lay awake that night thinking and praying. How was she to reach the hard heart of the dying man? Ah, that was the question. But after all she was but the feeble instrument, and God could easily work through her; she need not falter, for His power was infinite."

She reached Clinton next day without any difficulty, and found the doctor waiting for her at the very outskirts of the township. They rode through the principal streets together, greatly to the edification no doubt of the coterie before-named. As for the doctor, he was evidently proud of his graceful companion, and was very much disposed to forget the object of the ride, in the pleasure of her company.

"Have you heard anything further of Mr. Manville?" asked Minnie, as they neared the house.

"I saw him last night," replied the doctor; "he was sinking fast. I am afraid your ride will be of little service, excepting for the pleasure it affords me to have your companionship."

"While there is life there is hope, you know doctor," said Edith, relapsing into silence. But that thought revived her, and when at last they stopped before a small brick house, isolated from any other buildings, and bare of any embellishment, that thought gave her strength, and stilled her trembling footsteps as she slowly followed the doctor into the front room.

"Well, Mrs. Freeman," said the doctor, rather gravely, as a neat looking old woman came forward and bade them welcome, looking curiously at Minnie as she did so; "well; how is the patient?"

"Quiet, sir; quiet. He hasn't been making no noise since you were here last, only sometimes a low moan like. He's sensible, and I think he's fretting; but he's not long for this life, poor soul!"

"Will you sit down here, Miss Rayton, while I go in, and see him?" asked the doctor, politely handing a chair to Minnie. "This young lady is a family connection of Mr. Manville's," he added, turning in explanation to Mrs. Freeman, whose glances kept reverting to the young lady in question rather uncomfortably. "If I think well, she is anxious to have an interview with him; she is his daughter's friend."

"He keeps on talking about his daughter. Poor Miss Edith! this will be a sad blow to her," said the woman. "But I should think she'd like to see her father again."

"Yes," said Minnie, in reply, for the doctor had gone forward. "She would, I am sure, if it can only be contrived. But do you really think there is no hope for him?"

"None, miss; none. He has eaten nothing for these three weeks. It's just dying now he is; he can't live: Dr. Leigh says so too."

"And he is conscious; he understands you now?"

"Ah yes, miss; the tremens has gave off, but he's too weak to get over it."

"It's a mercy he has his senses," said Minnie. "Has any one visited him—any minister?"

"Well, miss, no," said the woman, with slight confusion. "You see the doctor ordered us to keep every one out. And my man wouldn't let even the minister in against the doctor's orders."

"I am very sorry," said Minnie, sadly. "You believe Mr. Manville to be dying, and is not his soul of consequence? Oh, do not keep any *good* from him, I beseech you."

"It was the doctor's orders, miss; we was bound to obey him," said the woman in a low confused voice. "But I believe you are right, and I for one 'll keep him out no more."

Minnie would have spoken, but at this moment the doctor returned, and coming up to her gravely,—“I have told Mr. Manville you are here, and who you are. He is perfectly sensible, and wishes to see you. I have a patient to visit a little way off; shall I go, and call for you on my return?”

"If you will be so kind, Dr. Leigh," and rising, Minnie followed the woman into the adjacent room, while the doctor went his way.

It was a small room into which she was ushered, but scrupulously clean, though simply furnished. The bedstead was bare of hangings, but the sheets, the blankets, and all the belongings were perfectly white, scarcely whiter than the poor, thin, haggard, ghostly face that rested among the pillows. The wild beseeching eyes looking out from the shaggy

eyebrows, in such a manner, that the tears rose to Minnie's eyes. She remembered his history, remembered what he had been—what a wreck he had become! and all through the influence of strong drink. Oh, how tenfold more fearful did it seem in its influence now!

"He stretched out a thin and almost skeleton hand towards her, trembling and uncertain, and in a weak, despairing voice, exclaimed, "You are my daughter's friend."

"Yes, Mr. Manville," said Minnie, kindly. "By marriage I am her cousin, and love her dearly."

"And have you the heart to come and see her father, who has so deeply injured her?" he returned, covering his eyes with his emaciated fingers, and moaning piteously.

"Yes," said Minnie, gently, "I have come to see you, having heard what you once were, till this madness came over you, this rage for the poison that is killing you. For your own as well as your daughter's sake, I wish to plead with you, to point you to that Saviour in whom you once believed, and who will not even now forsake you if you turn to Him." And Minnie seated herself by the sick man, and gently laid her hand upon his.

"Yes," he presently feebly groaned; "I know I am dying, I have but a few days, perhaps hours, to live; but I have deeply sinned—sinned against light and knowledge. I am without hope, without God." And through the thin fingers tears slowly trickled.

Minnie's tears flowed too, but she hailed *his* tears with joy. There was no hard stone to penetrate; sin's burden was felt, only the Saviour's love was placed on one side. The returning prodigal saw not his father in the distance, and despair was wringing his soul.

"You believe in a Saviour's love; you know He is able to forgive even your sins. Oh, is He not good," she exclaimed, "that He has in mercy spared you to consciousness, instead of cutting you off in delirium; and can you not go to Him, and ask His forgiveness?"

"How can I hope He will receive me who have so grievously wandered from Him—who have done so much evil in His sight?" The tones were hollow and despairing, and touched Minnie's soul.

Minnie opened her Bible—she had brought one with her—and for reply quietly read the history of the prodigal son, that touching history speaking so feelingly of the wandering away from home, the reveling and wasting of substance, the riotous living, the feeding upon husks, and subsequent repentance. As she read with faltering voice the beautiful words of the returning one—"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son," bitter sobs came from beneath the clothes, that the weak hands had drawn upwards, till she could with difficulty proceed. Her own tears fell fast upon the book, nearly blinding her, as she went on with the

pathetic recital: how the father with open arms received his prodigal son, not only freely forgiving him, but welcoming him with the best robe, with the fatted calf. As she concluded, she heard the outer door open, and the doctor's voice, and, unwilling to trespass upon his time, she arose.

"I am very sorry, but I am obliged to go, now," she softly said.

He stretched out his bony, trembling hand to her, "Thank you—thank you—God bless you! They have done me good, those words. Even I need not despair!"

"No indeed. Jesus will cast out none! His blood can wash away every guilty stain," said Minnie, earnestly.

"You will come again?" was the wistful question.

"Yes, oh yes; to-morrow if I can; and till then you will think of what I have read: you will go to your Father and ask forgiveness of Him, as the poor prodigal?"

He wrung her hand with all his feeble strength. "If I never see you again," he roused himself to say, "you have shed light upon my darkness, hope in my despair. Wretch as I am, I will go to this kind Father, I do not think He will cast me out!" and he lay back exhausted on his pillow.

Minnie wiped away her tears, but they came again and again as she rode home with Doctor Leigh. He looked grave and uneasy, and presently said,—

"I was sure it would distress you. I am sorry I did not more firmly oppose the visit."

"Oh no, doctor!" said Minnie earnestly. "I am glad I have been—very thankful. It has not hurt, but done me good; my tears are tears of hope, as well as of sorrow."

How that could be the doctor could not tell, for he knew the hours of the invalid were numbered; but he said nothing, and gradually the tears passed off, and Minnie tried to resume her usual cheerfulness. But after all, the return ride was a very grave and quiet one.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CLOSING SCENE.

LITTLE sleep visited Minnie's eyes that night; she could think of nothing but the poor dying creature she had left behind her, of the little ray of hope that had broken through the clouds of his despair; and all night long she prayed that the hope might grow, and bring fruition, that with all the burden of his sin, all his terrible catalogue of past misdeeds, he might flee to his Father, even as the prodigal, and find, like him, a living embrace, a full and free redemption. But Minnie did not rest there. She rose early, and leaving word with the servants that she was going to Campbell Dell, set off on her little pony, intending to surprise her friends at their breakfast.

That early morning ride was lovely and fresh. The air was rife with a thousand sweets. The golden wattle shook its delicate blossoms all wet with dew, and the fragrance distilled through the air was exquisitely rich. Numberless flowering shrubs had their incense to render, and flower bells, pure white, and blue, and lilac, and yellow, gently waved too and fro, scattering their modicum of sweets around.

Minnie cantered quite gaily along. The air was invigorating, and so was her mission. The mere hope

that the words she had read had been made a blessing to Edith's dying father was an exquisite joy to her. What would it be to Edith? She wanted to share her hopes and joys with some one, with those especially who would sympathise warmly with her; and now she was going to enlist Alex Campbell and his sister Helen in the service, to induce them to ride with her for another visit to the dying man.

As she passed Ben Wayte's, she saw him busily digging in their scrap of garden-ground in front of the house. He was preparing for some seeds she had promised him. She had brought the parcel with her, and drew her pony to the fence to attract his attention.

"I have brought your seeds, Ben," she cried with a smile, as he approached her, hat in hand, the sunshine of genuine pleasure all over his face. "I see you are making a fine garden out of that piece of land; and what an improvement you have made in your house since I called last! Why I scarcely knew it again."

"Yes, miss; thanks to you, we are going ahead a bit now," was the proud reply. "It's a shame as it hasn't been done before, but it's never too late to mend."

"But my uncle, did not he help you?"

"I never asked him, miss, that's a fact. I just thought I'd take the good of my own savings, and I *can* save now, miss, that I've done with the drink. And so thinks I, well, that roof does look bad, and so

I'll get some stuff and have the old one off, and just roof it afresh. And so I did in odd times, miss, early and late, and I do think I've made a pretty tight job of it."

"I think you have indeed, Ben. It does you credit. But I see you have glass windows as well."

"Yes, miss. You see, somehow in that illness I had learnt to like to look out a bit. I'd got kind o' fond of flowers, and trees, and such-like, all along of you, miss. I don't know as ever I thought on them before. And, says I, 'Mary, our next savings shall go in light. We'll have the sunshine in the room when we want it, and shade it with a bit of a veranda when we don't. I'll get a couple of windows made down at Clinton, and put in the glass myself.' And so I have, miss. Will you come in and see the wife, and how neat and tidy like all 's looking? It's all your own work."

"Not mine, Ben. If God has made me the happy, favoured instrument, the work is His. I am sure you enjoy your home better since you have done with drink. You are beginning to look quite stout and strong again."

"So I am, miss; stronger than I've been many a day."

"You recommend the cold water system by your appearance at any rate, Ben," said Minnie, smiling. "Do your old companions try to tempt you to your old ways again?"

"Oh yes, miss, but I don't mind them. I just tell

them I'm a pledged man, and ain't agoing to break my pledge. I find that a wonderful safeguard, and I'm very glad I signed, if only for that."

"I am very glad you signed, too," said Minnie. "It's the best day's work you have done in your life, I verily believe; and I should very much like a peep at your comfortable, happy little home, and to see Mrs. Wayte, but I must not stop this morning, for I have urgent business. I will come some other time. Good-bye. Remember me to your wife," and Minnie cantered off, while the young man stood looking after her with a reverential sort of admiration in his eyes. She was an angel of mercy in his estimation, and every word she spoke and every act she did was beautiful to him.

There were cheerful voices proceeding from the breakfast-room of Campbell Dell, as Minnie ran up the steps and stood a moment at the open door. Not that she waited to be announced. She was on sufficiently familiar terms to enter whenever and however she pleased, and presently she pushed open the sitting-room door, and stood confessed before the group of friends in all the fresh brightness of a morning's ride.

There was a general exclamation.

"You dear little thing!" cried Jessie, springing up, and nearly upsetting her coffee by doing so.

"Well this is good of you," was Helen's quieter salute.

"So good," echoed, Alex, "that if the face were a thought less bright, I should fear evil tidings."

"I have come for help as usual," said Minnie, permitting herself to be forced into a chair, at the table; her hat and cloak forcibly removed. "I want you *both*," she continued, colouring a little, and sipping the coffee Helen had poured out for her.

"*Both!*" shouted Jessie. "Now I know that excludes me!" she added with a saucy pout.

"So it does this time," replied Minnie, smiling. "But you will agree with me that it is right," she added more gravely, "when you hear what I have to tell you," and to very interested listeners, she related her tale, ending with the question, put with very pleading eyes,—“You will go?”

"Of course we will," replied both Helen and her brother, and the latter gravely added,—

"I am glad that you did not doubt our willingness, Miss Minnie. You could not in such a case as this believe we could hesitate for a moment;" and pushing his chair back from the table, he rose at once. "There are two or three orders I must give before leaving, but I shall be ready with the horses at the door, by the time you are all ready," and he left the room as he spoke.

Half an hour afterwards, Minnie and her two Scotch friends passed through the large gates of Campbell Dell, and cantered along the road to Clinton; not indeed by the regular road: Mr. Campbell knew another less frequented, but more lovely, which lay through scrubby plains, and grassy hollows, and green hill-sides, purple with the

Australian violet; a wild, romantic way, Minnie pronounced it, but beautiful enough to have been chosen for its beauty, even had it been longer, instead of nearer to the desired village; sometimes they had to stoop their heads low to avoid depending branches, sometimes there were prostrate logs spanning the way that must be leaped, and as Minnie was not quite expert horse woman enough to undertake them, there was the fun of dismounting, crossing the logs on foot, and resuming the saddle on the other side, to which Alex Campbell, brought her tiny steed. Brawling creeks ran babbling sometimes across their way, and singular up-piled rocks flung together in confusion, as by giant hands, gave wildness to the scene, and threw an air of romance over all. Minnie, thoroughly enjoyed the ride, and only that the memory of what they were going to witness, kept their spirits in check, they would have been a very light headed party indeed.

That memory came again, and again, and Minnie felt strong in the thought, that she had another to depend upon, one in whom the love of God dwelt so richly, that its evidence often stole out amidst the course of every-day converse.

"How I wished you had been present yesterday," she exclaimed, with simple warmth. "Your words flow so readily—so easily to mine! you would have had so much more to say for Christ, so much more encouragement to bestow; and poor Mr. Manville needs so much, he is so utterly bowed down, so crushed and broken by his sin."

"It was best as it was, Miss Minnie," replied Alex, turning with beaming eyes towards her. "The right words were said, depend upon it. You took him straight to the testimony. God will assuredly bless His own word,—you believe that."

"Oh yes; I believe that; but I also believe that there are ways of bringing forward those words, that all do not equally possess."

"I believe that too," said Alex, gravely; "but I am sure if you could not do my work, I could in no way do yours. You were yesterday in the right place, Minnie," he continued, more gently; "to-day, perhaps, I shall be that too."

As they rapidly passed through Clinton, and by the doctor's house, they saw his horse standing, waiting ready saddled before the door, a sign that he had not yet commenced his rounds. It was early yet, only nine o'clock, and not a great deal was stirring in Clinton. The school bell was loudly summoning the loitering children to school; groups of whom, here and there in the roads and along the paths, were visible, slowly sauntering with unwilling feet to their wonted tasks. A few early waggons were rattling over the hard road; German for the most part, for a German population was distributed over some of the surrounding districts; and German butter and eggs, and vegetables of German raising found a ready sale in the stores. But they were soon out of Clinton, and hurrying forward again by a shorter cut, diverging from the road, through a plantation of young wattles,

now in full bloom and beauty. The track was broad and well beaten, and they rode silently and rapidly along; for the nearer they came to their journey's end, the more thoughtful they each became.

What if they were too late? thought Minnie. What if there was no longer need of the visit? And her heart beat rapidly, and her cheek grew pale, as they came in sight of the house, and gradually drew near.

"We are not the only visitors," said Mr. Campbell, gravely, pointing to the side of the house, where two horses were standing, hitched to the fence, and he sprung from his horse as he spoke, and assisted the ladies to alight.

There were other visitors; at the door they were met by Mr. Palmer, the Wesleyan minister, who recognised Minnie, and quietly extended his hand.

"It is the closing scene, Miss Rayton," he exclaimed gravely; "but not without hope. Blessed be God, not without hope!"

"Shall we go in?" asked Alex Campbell; for Minnie's tears were choking her. "Is there any one here besides the nurse?"

"His daughter, and her husband," replied the old minister. "They sent for her at two o'clock this morning—he begged so hard to see her once more, and she came at once. Her husband brought her. Poor thing! she needs the presence of these ladies."

"Edith here! Oh let me go to her, poor child!" said Minnie, earnestly.

"Yes; go. *He* has asked for you, too, more than once; he mingles your name with his prayers, with his hopes. God bless you for your ministration of love."

Taking her hand in his, Alex Campbell quietly drew her into the chamber of death; a chamber of death it was indeed, but not bereft of the light of hope. There lay the prodigal, stript of all his earthly store, worn and weary with his earthly journey, perishing as the result of his own riotous living; but with a Father's smile resting upon him, a Father's loving arms supporting him, and the forgiving words of a Father whispering in his dying ears. Minnie read all that in the upward glance of the fast glazing eyes, in the smile that shed a light even over the shadow of death. The sinner had found the Saviour; the criminal was kneeling at the foot of the cross; and now the best robe was in preparation, the jeweled ring, the crown. Oh matchless gift! the gift of Thine only beloved Son, O our Father! Oh pearl of great price, Thy forgiving love! .

Edwin Rayton came forward from the window where he was moodily standing, and silently shook hands with his cousin and her companions.

"They sent for her; she would come; and I suppose it was right that she should—but it will half kill her," he said, indicating his wife, who lay, by her father's side, with her face buried in the pillow, and his hand clasped in hers.

"You were right, quite right, to bring her, dear

Edwin," said Minnie tearfully; and she stole round the bed to Edith's side. What a pale face was lifted to hers, as the pressure of Minnie's kiss fell upon her hand! And with what a gush of overwhelming sorrow the head went down again, as the single words, "Oh Minnie!" passed her lips.

Minnie stood still by the couch, with bowed head, her tears falling fast; and Alex Campbell and his sister took up their position on the other side of the bed in silence, for the dying man was in one of those fitful dozes that so often herald the approach of death.

He presently roused, and turned slightly towards his daughter, murmuring feebly, "Edie!"

"Father, dear father!"

"You have shed—bitter tears," he feebly whispered, "many times over—your sinful father; bless God, my child, that, in his last hours—he has hope—of forgiveness—don't cry!"

"You feel," said Alex Campbell, kindly, "that even *your* sins are blotted out?"

"Even *mine*! yes, *mine*! Precious blood! no guilty stain too deep!—riotous living—spent all—yet—forgiven."

A slight spasm passed over him, and then he lay quite still, so still that but for one or two half-murmured words, they would have thought he had ceased to breathe.

"You have reason indeed to bless God, Mrs. Rayton," said Alex Campbell, "that he has permitted you

to hear such words as these from your father's lips. It is true: Jesus casts out none. He is a loving Father, receiving every returning prodigal with open arms." And kneeling at the bedside, he poured forth a fervent prayer, of mingled praise and thanksgiving and entreaty, such as Minnie had never heard before. It sank deeply into her heart, as word after word of joyous assurance poured forth. On the wings of that prayer the soul of the dying one passed away; a sharp struggle, a passing groan, and all was over.

Edwin lifted his fainting wife in his arms, and bore her from the room, followed by Minnie and Helen.

"Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!" exclaimed Alex Campbell, as he presently followed Mr. Palmer into the other room, and seated himself upon the first vacant chair.

"Amen!" was the fervent answer. "Thrice amen!" "Poor Manville! how little I ever hoped that such an end might be his! But God's power is infinite."

"Yes; we have all much to be thankful for, much to admire in the wonderful goodness and mercy of a long-suffering Saviour," said Alex Campbell gravely; "God has been very gracious in removing the terrible paroxysms of the disorder that I hear at first racked his frame, and so fearfully reduced him; so that space for repentance and return to his Father were granted him."

"Yes, indeed;" said Mr. Palmer. "It has been my lot to stand at the death-bed of more than one

drunkard," he continued, "and years will never obliterate from my mind the horror of those scenes. The love of strong drink is a fearful curse, a scourge even to the drunkard."

"Have you been here long? Were you able to converse much with Mr. Manville?"

"I have been here all night, sir; and have had much converse with him, and am fully satisfied that our poor friend is a pardoned man, a happy ransomed spirit. Blessed be God for that persuasion! Under God, he owes all to that dear young lady;" and he pointed to Minnie, who was unconsciously standing in the adjacent room. "The words she spoke and read to him only yesterday were richly blessed to him, they so perfectly accorded with his case. I went over it all again during the night, at his earnest request. He poured down blessings continually upon Miss Rayton, and God *will* bless her."

"It is her mission. She delights in doing good," said Alex Campbell, with deep admiration in his tones, as he looked at the unconscious face, half turned from him, and scarcely visible beneath the hat and veil.

"She is a prize worth having—God bless her!" said the old man, significantly wringing the other's hand, and then turning on his heel he left the house.

"A prize worth having!" Yes; Alex Campbell knew that. But for whose possession? At present she was happy, contented in her work; at present no aspirant had ground for either hope or despair.

Edwin Rayton waited till Edith was able to take one last kiss of the lifeless lips of her father. Death had restored in some measure the expression of happier times; the smile lingered on his lips; but death was legibly written there as well,—so legibly, that Edwin had again to carry away his fainting wife to the chaise he had procured in lieu of the horses; and having drawn a promise from Minnie to be with them next day, he drove rapidly home.

Minnie went straight to Glen Lewin. She was tired and weary with her journey and her overwrought feelings; and so her kind friends contented themselves as best they might in commending her to the care of her aunt, and returning home alone. Overwrought and weary, yet very happy, Minnie lay long awake that night, thinking over the events of the past day, till at last sweet sleep surprised her, and she slept till after the sun was high in the heavens, for it had stolen even to her very pillow without waking her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MINNIE'S PLEDGE-BOOK.

A SEVERE illness fell to the portion of Edwin Rayton's wife immediately after her father's death; an illness that brought into play some of Minnie's dormant qualities, and convinced her cousin that she was as eminently practical as theoretical. By degrees he began to pay more respect to her opinions, to listen with greater attention to her arguments, and to falter a little in his own. He did not own it, but Minnie could see that the death of his wife's father had made considerable impression upon him, and was silently working side by side with her words. Gradually even his arguments ceased, and more than once he left the wine, that was still formally placed upon the table untouched and untasted. Minnie augured favourably from these signs, and rejoiced, for she knew to how much it would increase Edith's happiness to have the one fear that was ever present with her entirely removed from her home.

Poor Edith! She came from her sick room a veritable snow-drop, looking all the whiter and more ethereal for the deep mourning she wore; and so weak, that she was carried in her husband's strong arms from her room to the sofa, and even with that exertion nearly fainting away.

"I am afraid, Edie, you are disobeying the doctor's orders," said Edwin half reproachfully, as he gravely emptied a bottle of eau de Cologne on her handkerchief, and bathed the pale brow.

She smiled faintly, and whispered, "I shall soon be better now I am up once more, dear Edwin."

"You have no strength, Edie; I don't see that you gain much. Do you take what the doctor orders?"

"Minnie sees that I take all my medicine regularly," Edith replied, a little flush of colour coming into the thin cheek, as she lifted a pair of imploring eyes to his.

He sat down on the couch beside her, and gently stroked the hair away from the fair brow in silence for a few moments, but he presently said,—

"Don't you think that you and Minnie are carrying prejudices too far when you refuse necessary stimulants,—and they are necessary in your case, dear Edie. The doctor told me so. He is a clever man, and ranks high in his profession, and in general esteem. Do you think that you are acting quite fairly towards Dr. Leigh in rejecting his advice?"

"Yes, Edwin dear. Doctor Leigh knows I do not like it—he knows, too, I do not take it; and I don't really think he believes it to be necessary."

"Why should he order it then? He says it is, at any rate. And why should you be more scrupulous than the temperance pledge? That admits of the use of wine or spirits if ordered by a medical man. It really seems to me to be going beyond reason, refusing what in some cases is an absolute benefit."

"Don't be angry, dear Eddy," said his little wife, putting up her fragile hands to stroke his flushed brow. "I don't like wine, and don't think it would do me the least good ; and Minnie gives me plenty of nice strengthening things. You will see I shall get well quite as soon, and sooner, without wine or anything of the sort, than with."

"Well, well ; have your own way. Let me see it though, or I shall certainly quarrel with both you and Minnie for riding your hobby to excess ;" and kissing her, he went off, leaving her to his cousin, who just then entered with a little tray, delicately provided with invalid fare.

And spite of his fears to the contrary, Edith gained strength day by day, and was soon able to walk slowly about their park, as Minnie playfully called it ; to take deliciously slow drives through the country, and quiet rides on her gentle horse, till Edwin was obliged to own that it was possible to gather strength, even after a severe illness, without the aid of those never-failing resources of the convalescent—the decanter, and its companion the bitter ale or porter bottle. As to Dr. Leigh, he seemed in no wise offended that his advice was utterly disregarded. He was perfectly satisfied with the results, and laughingly told Minnie that she must take her own way, though it was little less than treason to interfere with his patients. There was no reason to complain of inattention on his part ; he was most assiduous in his visits ; and more than once when Edwin, returning home, found that gen-

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tleman very cosily enjoying himself at his fireside, he quizzically demanded of his cousin, in a malicious aside, whether the doctor had not two patients instead of one to tax his time so heavily; all which pleasantries Minnie took in good part, paying little attention to them.

After the first bitterness of mourning for her father's death was over, and Edith could reflect more calmly, she found that her thoughts of him were far less painful than they had been for a long time. She had lost him, it is true; but the mortal had put on the bright unstained robes of immortality—the corruptible had assumed the vesture of incorruptibility. The earth stains were gone; the Saviour's precious blood had been sought and won. There was glorious hope even for him; though he had wasted so many precious years of life in the service of a hard task master. Yes; she felt she might turn her eyes to the celestial country, with the bright the happy expectation of meeting both father and mother again; and ought she to grieve? she, who had endured so much suffering on her father's account,—so much dread, so much fear, so much shame! No; rather she had reason to rejoice that he was taken away from the evil—from the thousand temptations that so easily beset him. Gradually she grew happy in the reflection; and now the only thing that troubled her was the absence of her only brother. She had not seen him for many months, and had not the slightest idea of his whereabouts. Was he taking

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the same course as his father? Placed amid temptations, might he not too easily succumb to the same dread foe? She hinted her fears to her husband—her anxiety for her brother's welfare; telling him that to see him once more in a way to attain a respectable and honourable living was all she needed to complete her restoration to health.

"If that is all, Edie, I will undertake to find your brother before long," he answered, quietly. "A few advertisements properly worded will be all that is needful, if he is in the Colony. And then you must fulfil your bargain by getting well."

Meanwhile Minnie returned home to Glen Lewin. She had been long wanted, though how much she had little expected. She was scarcely prepared for the warm and rejoicing welcome she received both from her uncle and aunt.

"Just thinking of coming to fetch you," said the former, in his usual puffy voice. "Want nursing myself; time Ned's wife was well by this."

"She has been very ill, uncle. Poor little thing! she has suffered so much."

"Suffered! more reason to be glad, I should think. Good riddance of a father of that kind—eh?"

"She has reason to be glad," said Minnie, gravely, "but not as you mean, dear uncle; not glad because she was rid of him, but because at the last he went with all his sins to the Saviour, and was not turned away, but forgiven!"

Mr. Rayton looked thoughtfully into the fire for a

few moments, for the evenings now and then were still chilly, admitting of its cosy companionship, and Minnie and her uncle were for a short time left to its solitary enjoyment.

"I suppose you believe in repentance, and all that sort of thing," he presently exclaimed, without turning towards her. She could scarcely tell whether sneeringly or not.

"Yes," said Minnie, earnestly; "indeed I do."

"Well, as far as my experience goes, any one can get up a fit of repentance—does, no doubt of it. But what's the use if one does just the same thing again when one gets the chance, say what you will. What's the use of it, I say?"

"There is a repentance that needeth not to be repented of," said Minnie, in low, sad tones. "A repentance that leads away from one's own weakness to a strong Saviour."

"Well——, but don't tell me, Minnie," said her uncle. "I know something of these things. Don't you suppose that if Manville had recovered that illness, instead of going off the hooks as he did, that he would have gone full swing on the old course, the first temptation that came in his way?"

"I don't know, uncle; I can't say. Habits, bad habits, are fearfully strong, and the craving after drink is, I know, like a mania; but there are many reformed drinkers; many whose lives and homes have been wretched for many a year, who come forth even as if from their graves, under the influence of

temperance, even though they possessed no love of God in their hearts. Had Mr. Manville lived, God could have given the needful strength to do battle with the foe. And I am sure of this, that his repentance was sincere, his sorrow genuine, and his rejoicing in Christ's forgiveness real. Perhaps a loving Father took the weak and erring one in very loving-kindness and mercy to his rest, where no temptation can ever again assail him."

"I don't know much about these things, Minnie—not, I suppose, what I ought to—such an old sinner as I am," said her uncle, with his face still turned from her, and towards the fire; "not but what I've thought it all over many and many a time; not but what I have repented over and over again; but you see, it has been no use; old habits are strong, and they grow upon me. I have thought a little about it while you've been away. I've been ill, had a little return of the old fit,—not much; it passed away directly, child—you needn't fear; that's why I wouldn't let them send for you; but it made me think a little, as I tell you, only I don't see that it's much use trying to abstain—don't know that I could do it either."

"O uncle! dear uncle!" cried Minnie, throwing her arms round him. "You can, you can, I am sure, if you will only resolve to try. Indeed, indeed you must; we shall lose you if you don't. For the love of us all, for the love of your own soul, do, oh do put the horrid drink away!"

"I am rather old, Minnie, for a new course of life;

"I fear it wouldn't answer," said her uncle, sadly shaking his head.

"But it is death to continue the present course. Oh think of poor Mr. Manville's end! think of the wretched state of health, of nerves, of mind, to which intemperance leads. Dear uncle, you will not mind me speaking so plainly. You know it is true; you know the state into which it has brought you."

"Well, well, child, I know; I have thought it all over, as I told you. This little spell of illness, perhaps Manville's death, and, more than all, missing you since I've been ill, brought your words and arguments back to my mind. You've been a bit of a check upon me already, little girl. I was far worse before you crossed the sea, by a great deal; and I don't mind telling you, since I'm on the subject, that I've served one hard master long enough, and I should be glad to enter the service of another, if He will only let me." The words came out heartily, and yet with an effort that was almost painful.

Minnie's tears fell fast. "O uncle, dear, dear uncle! how glad I am to hear you say that! Let you! Jesus never turns away any that come to Him."

"But it will be hard, Minnie, hard, very hard, for me to get rid of this craving, this incessant craving. I've been trying it this last two or three days, and you'll have to help me, Minnie. I'm a poor weak creature as ever lived; ten to one that I give way. It's a sin and a curse—a dreadful curse—to one,

this love of drink; and it's a fearful battle to wage against that love. Do you think, child, there's any hope of conquering?"

"Hope! oh yes," said Minnie, brightly; "more hope still if you begin in the right way, dear uncle, and take the difficulty to Jesus. I'm sure He will help—He will give strength—never fear! But we won't do things by halves, uncle, for that will be like parleying with the enemy. You've really decided—temperance is to win the day?"

"I've really decided to try, my child, if that's what you mean. I hate the sin, hard as I find it to resist. But I'll try, please God. I'll try to become a better man. But you must help me, Minnie; it seems to me I must have human help, for I am as weak as water against this foe that has conquered me for years, and is trying hard to get the better of me now."

"I'll gladly help you," said Minnie, joyfully. "I'll help all I can, and so will dear aunt. Oh, what a happy home we'll have yet! It only wanted this to make Glen Lewin an earthly paradise."

Mr. Rayton dashed a tear from his eye with one hand, and softly stroked Minnie's head with the other, as she rested it on his shoulder.

"You're a dear good little girl, Minnie. I hope with all my heart your old uncle may not disappoint you," he presently exclaimed, in a voice husky with emotion.

"Ah, you will not! you will not!" cried Minnie, springing up. "Now may I go to work?" she asked, with a significant smile as she walked across the

room to the sideboard, where the decanters and spirit flasks in their elegant silver stands were placed. They were all empty, and she turned round inquiringly to her uncle.

"I emptied them three days ago. Frightened your aunt a bit, I believe. She thought I was out of my senses, when, ill as I was, I managed to crawl across the room, seize the decanters, and laying violent hands on all the wine and spirits within reach, I threw open the window, and emptied the contents of the bottles one after another to the last drop;" and Mr. Rayton laughed out at the recollection of the scene that presented itself to his memory. "Poor little wife! she has had reason enough to be frightened at my actions; but, please God, she never shall again," he added more quietly, and in reverential tones.

Minnie brought her hands together in extreme thankfulness. Here were answers to prayers she had almost feared to expect, a seal to her mission she had so earnestly desired, and yet so unbelievably, so little expected. She remembered Edwin's former taunting words respecting his father, and the power of her mission to do *him* good. What would he say now, if this should be in reality accomplished? It seemed almost too good to be true.

She looked at her uncle; he was busily feeling for something in the depths of his pocket, something not easily found at once. He looked up presently and called her.

"Here, Minnie," he said, holding out the well-

remembered keys of the wine cellar. "I give these into your charge; mind, I solemnly give them to you, and in no case are you to yield them up, either to me or to any one else, however much you are entreated or stormed at, or commanded to do so. Will you accept the charge?"

"I will most gratefully, uncle; and here comes aunt to bear witness. These wine cellar keys it is of which we are speaking, auntie dear. Uncle gives them up to me, and neither for himself nor for any one else will I give them up again; bear me witness."

A bright, happy smile came over the pale face, like a flash of bygone sunshine, and Mrs. Rayton came round and kissed her fondly. Then turning to her husband she threw her arms around him, and quiet tears fell from the eyes that were hidden on his shoulder. It was a happy moment for husband and wife; and Minnie felt it almost too sacred for witness. She softly crept out of the room, and in the quiet of her own chamber, poured forth her glad, joyous thanksgiving for even this commencement of good in her uncle, her father's brother. Her heart was very, very full that evening; but the tears that fell were tears of great joy.

In the secret drawer of her writing-desk she hid away the keys that had wrought so much mischief. It was an important trust, and might prove a difficult one; but she resolved to conquer and hold them fast, happen what might. She prayed for strength and ability to be able to do so, whatever occurred. Her

fight against the demon of strong drink that had entered her uncle's household must be determined and vigorous. It should be. Minnie needed not a thought, a second thought upon the subject.

"Uncle," she exclaimed, as she sat in her old position, pouring out the tea for their snug little party a little later that evening, "you know I have a pledge-book; don't you think it would be a great help to you if you were to sign?"

"I shouldn't like to sign, and then break my pledge, Minnie," said her uncle; "that would be fool's work indeed."

"Oh, but you don't intend to do that. That's out of the question altogether," said Minnie, gaily. "I had a letter a day or two ago from John, and he says he is coming home next week. He has only been waiting to sign till he does so in company with Jack Jones, the shepherd, who has promised to sign too."

"What! that drunken fellow? Why it will be pounds in my pocket if he does. That fellow has lost no end of sheep by his drunken habits; and yet he's such a clever fellow when sober, that I never cared to turn him off."

"Well, uncle, he's a temperance man now; his very first act was to break all his bottles and stave the barrel he had hidden away in the hut. John told me all about it, and it was John who did the good."

"John! bless the boy! What, does he uphold temperance?"

"Yes, indeed, uncle; with might and main; and he

is going to sign my book, when he comes with Jack next week. Now I should like so much for your name to stand first. Would it not be a surprise?" said Minnie, eagerly.

"I rather think it would, child. Well, after tea we'll talk about it again."

"But see, uncle, here is the book. I have it here, and pen and ink. I'll clear a space on this table, by your side, in a minute; there's no need to wait till after tea; the second cup will be sweeter, uncle."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed her uncle. "Nothing like striking the iron while it's hot, I see. Well, hand over. Now let me read the pledge I am to take." And putting on his spectacles, drawing the lamp nearer to him, and shading his eyes with his hand, partly to help his sight, more to help his emotion, he slowly and gravely went through and twice through every word. Then solemnly taking up a pen, and dipping it in the ink, he wrote in large characters, though with a trembling hand, his well known signature; and pushing the book towards Minnie, abruptly turned his face from her to the fire.

"I've done it—I've done it!" he exclaimed in low tones. "God help me to keep it! They are solemn words, and if I broke such a pledge as *that*, I should be a perjured man for ever!"

"You won't break it, dear uncle, you won't—I know you won't," said Minnie, joyously. "God *will* help you, and it will be new life and happiness to you, I am sure of that." She turned to take up her

book, and hold it a moment to the fire, but in that moment another name had been added, in delicate feminine characters. Her aunt had softly stolen behind her, and a tear was yet glistening on the paper beside it: not a tear of sorrow, but a tear of joy.

"We will begin this new life together, dear John," she softly said, as her husband, looking up fondly at her, exclaimed,—

"Silly little wife; there was no need for *you* to sign!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

HELP.

WHAT a light heart had Minnie Rayton that night, as she lay upon her pillow, looking through the parted curtains at the glorious moonlight that was bedewing the trees and hills with its chastened radiance. She was almost too glad to sleep, too wonderingly glad; for a wonder it seemed to her, a perfect miracle, that her uncle had really entered his name in her book, had really commenced serious warfare with his besetting sin. It was in no light spirit he had done so; he was not the man to take up a thing unthought of; his whole habit was too systematical, too business-like, for that. She hoped, too, he was not engaging in a warfare at his own charge; she hoped, nay, she believed, he was not; that more serious thoughts and desires had decided his course; that a glimpse of another world had had something to do with moulding his present conduct. How rejoiced, how thankful she was! how honoured that she should have been the chosen instrument, as she had so greatly desired, to lead her erring uncle to see the error of his ways, and to have a desire to do and be right!

She rejoiced, and yet with trembling, for well she knew the strength and the power of the enemy with

whom they were contending. Her uncle's last words as they parted that night would have convinced her of that, had she not known it before.

"Keep those keys out of my sight, Minnie. I've done my part; forbidden any servant on the place to bring wine or spirits near the premises, on pain of *instant dismissal*, even though I order it myself. I can't trust myself, you see, child."

"Trust me, trust in God," had been her reply, with her good-night kiss.

Three days and three nights, and no drop of anything stronger than tea or coffee, had passed Mr. Rayton's lips, in spite of moments of intense craving that caused him to spring from his seat, and pace backwards and forwards with impatient strides, like a chained prisoner. And yet, in the face of that craving, he signed the pledge, and as an honourable man, he disdained to break it. But it was as he said, and as Minnie surmised: a glimpse into the other world had decided him. Those few weeks of Minnie's absence, during which spring had been fast mellowing into summer, the restraint of her presence gone, her uncle had returned to longer and more frequent potations, against which his poor, timid little wife's feeble expostulations were of little avail. Sometimes she thought of recalling Minnie home, so powerless did she feel. And so great did the danger appear, that once she spoke to Dr. Leigh, and entreatingly asked him to reason with her husband. But the bantering, careless character of his words, passed

almost unheeded, upon ears that were willingly deaf. The consequence was, as he told Minnie, that one day, after a little extra imbibing, he was found at the table in a state of semi-unconsciousness, suffering from a slight attack of his former complaint, from which he was most certainly more easily roused, but which he felt had loosened another pin in his earthly tabernacle. Lying in that half-conscious state, he had heard words from Dr. Leigh, which decided, while they appalled him.

"He is liable to another attack at any time, and another would most probably take him off. His only chance is strict abstemiousness."

He rose from his couch a new man; life and death had appeared plainly photographed before him during those few hours in which those around deemed that he either slept or was unconscious. Life, his past life, its worthlessness, its wickedness, and the future, and what it had for him. Those are awful moments in which we find ourselves weighed in the balances, and found wanting; when naked and worthless, we stand in the presence of a pure and holy God, owing so much, and having nothing to pay. Was he bartering his precious soul, as Minnie so often said, for the pleasures of the wine-cup? Was a drunkard's grave to be his? Was this insidious, this deceitful poison, running like liquid fire strongly in his veins, to lead to the "drunkard's hell"? Who can tell the agony and remorse that rallied through and through him, like a swelling tide, during those

days that followed, when even amidst his agony he yet tampered with the enemy. The old and little-used Bible he brought out from its corner one day, and sat brooding over its pages ; when all at once he came upon words that burnt into his inmost soul ; words the import of which he so truly comprehended, and yet words that he had never before read,—

“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.

“At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

“At the last.” Yes ; it was this last he was experiencing ; the stinging of the adder, the biting of the serpent was his position. But could he not wrench away this serpent ? Could he not dash aside the poison bowl ? Was it yet too late ? Oh was it yet too late to be saved—saved from himself, from his sins ? Too late to have a title to those mansions in which a sainted mother had long dwelt, in which father and mother and brother, ah, and his own little daughter, were among the happy spirits, “blest, blest for aye !” The strong man, now weak as a child, went down on his knees, and implored forgiveness and help, in very bitterness of soul. Think you not that that help was at hand ?

For three days after that, the fearful struggle went on ; no intoxicating liquors, as we before said, passed his lips, but a fiery trial it was, scarcely to be imagined by any one but those who have entered on

the conflict; day and night the desire pursued him, but he fiercely fought against it. Even his wife watched, half in terror, half in anguish, the terrific battle, adding her prayers to those that in the stillness of the night she heard poured forth in almost agony of spirits, by her husband's fevered lips. Again and again she would have sent for Minnie, but that he would not allow; yet little did she guess, when she did come, what a true welcome awaited her from each; and, how like the promised help she seemed to her poor uncle, she never knew.

She did know something of what he suffered, something of the craving that tortured him; as day by day went by and he held firmly to his pledge. That was legibly written on his countenance, and tears would steal into her eyes, when weak and faint he would come to her, exclaiming imploringly,—

"Minnie, you know the pledge don't forbid wine or spirits for medicinal purposes. I should think I might just have a something for this weakness without breaking my word."

"No, uncle, no. No medical man would sanction it in your case; to you it is especially poison. Hold on, dear uncle; this craving will soon go off."

"I fear not, Minnie. It rages fearfully at times, you cannot tell. I'm afraid I'm too old, too confirmed a drinker; but I won't break my pledge in my senses."

Minnie was thankful for that, but what could she

do ; what could she do to help him ? to relieve some of his misery ? Her aunt had a few old medical books ; she hunted them out, and quietly but diligently searched them through for some receipt that would aid in correcting the vitiated appetite, in restoring the tone of the weakened stomach, and in staying the terrible craving. But nothing came across her eager vision ; it seemed as if her poor uncle must struggle on unaided in his feebleness. She could find nothing to help him.

“I’ll see Dr. Leigh myself,” she exclaimed one morning ; “not here, but alone ; I’ll ride over to Clinton, and make him help me, make him tell me of something that will help. He must know ; and it’s too bad that he continues to uphold what has been the cause of so much misery.”

With Minnie, to think was to act. After breakfast she declared that there were so many little things she wanted,—fancy stationery and crochet needles, and a thousand et ceteras, so important to a lady, so incomprehensible to a gentleman ; that to obtain these she most positively go to Clinton, just for a few hours ; she would be back soon, if her uncle would only spare her ; and he was reluctantly obliged to consent.

It was a morning indeed for a ride, balmy and beautiful. The sun would have been too warm, had it not been tempered by the delightful breeze that fluttered her hat and strings and toyed with her veil, as she swept along the road to Clinton ; a well-

known road now, with a memento for every fence. Sunshine and breeze and foliage, the grass the flowers and the birds, all rendered the ride a lovely one. But Minnie's thoughts were chiefly of the end of her journey, and whether she should find the doctor at home or out.

Entering Clinton, she went at once to his house. There was no horse standing without, awaiting his master's behest. Minnie's heart sank within her, as she sprang from her saddle, and laid her hand on the knocker above the portentous brass plate, and then stood waiting the response to her knock, with anxious eyes fixed on the gay crimson and purple lamp, through which a ray of sunshine was pouring rich tints to the ground.

"Dr. Leigh has been gone ten minutes, miss," was the reply of the old housekeeper as she opened the door.

"Is he riding? Do you know which way he has gone? I wish to see him particularly."

"He's not gone far, miss; just up the Dunstan Road—that road off among the hills. He's a rather bad case to attend there; he walked this morning. Won't you step in, miss, and sit down, and wait?"

"Thank you, no; it's important that I see the doctor, but I have no time to wait. If I ride up that road, I shall probably overtake him, or meet him returning. I had better do that, I think." And again springing to her saddle, Minnie turned her reins and horse's head in the direction of the Dunstan

Road, little caring for the group of heads that were looking through the open window of the dressmaker's opposite, or the very eager and significant glances that were passed between the baker's wife and the shoemaker's daughter, who were sunning themselves at the door of their respective shops, and regailing their eyes with the graceful vision that swept as calmly past them, and from their sight, as though they had never existed.

The Dunstan Road turned from the township; it lay at its very extremity, and led through graceful pine-trees, and clustering she-oaks, and scrubby undergrowth, in a tolerably broad drag-track to habitable places, here and there indicated by the fences on either hand, by the presence of a comfortable brood of chickens here and there, disporting in the horses' foot way, or by the curling smoke of a chimney among the trees. Minnie went more leisurely along, when she had fairly entered the road, stooping once or twice to gather a flower, whose fair stem, exalted above its companions, attracted her attention and came within her reach, or a small pine branch that arrested her steps by its symmetrical beauty, or lingering to hear the few sweet notes warbled by the "shepherd's companion," or black magpie, which even here, in so close proximity to the township, seemed free to roam unharmed and unmolested. She partly slackened her pace to allow the doctor time to visit his patient, and return, for in her haste, she had failed to inquire whose house he was visiting, or

the exact whereabouts thereof. She only knew that along that road she should meet him, or overtake him, and she resolved to go on till she did. She was rewarded. Scarcely half a mile up the road, she saw him leaving a small house on her right hand, some yards before her, and slowly, very slowly, turn his face homewards. That he was in no haste was evident; or the morning was pleasant, and his leisure being more abundant, he was resolved to make the best of it; for as he came nearer, Minnie saw that he had a magazine in his hands, with which he was so deeply engrossed that he did not observe her pony drawn up to the side of the road, under the broad shadow of a tree, till she pronounced his name. He looked up then with a start, and came forward with an exclamation of even greater surprise than pleasure, though the latter feeling was by no means dormant.

"Miss Minnie! Have you come down from the skies? Who would have dreamt to see you in Dunstan Road this time of day at any rate, and alone!"

"I came in search of you, doctor," replied Minnie. "Your housekeeper said you had gone in this direction. I am glad I have found you."

"Nothing the matter at home, I hope," said the doctor, rather seriously. "My services are not required, are they?"

"Nothing more than usual," said Minnie, rather sadly; for she felt troubled lest even this visit should

prove useless. "I have come to consult you, doctor, —by yourself," she added, rather hesitatingly, watching the hand that was caressing her pony's head, and thereby escaping the looks that were earnestly fixed upon her face.

"Not on your own account, surely. Your appearance belies that, Miss Minnie."

"On my uncle's account," responded Minnie, scarcely noticing the interruption. "He is suffering very much from his efforts to abstain from all intoxicating drinks. I want to aid him. I want you to assist me in doing so. Is there nothing in all your pharmacopœia that has power to destroy the unnatural craving after intoxicating stimulants that so strongly harasses one who has so long been addicted to their use as my uncle?"

"The shortest way to stop the craving is to administer a little brandy. Why not give him a little?"

"Because I don't believe in its efficacy, doctor," said Minnie, indignantly,— "I can scarcely think you do, either—and, because my uncle has signed the pledge. I am sure it will be the saving of his life. But I can but believe something must exist to allay the torture that this new kind of life occasions as a matter of course. I would give anything, doctor, if you could only tell of some good remedy."

His hand was on her bridle; but as he spoke his eye kindled with sudden light, and he laid it on hers. "Will you give me yourself, Minnie?" he

exclaimed. "Give me yourself : I don't want anything else. Ah, Minnie Rayton, make glad a solitary home. I'll do anything, be anything you wish, if you will but give me that promise."

For a moment Minnie sat stunned in her seat by the suddenness of the declaration ; for a moment she scarcely remembered where she was, or what she was doing ; but, as words kept pouring forth, as she turned and saw his earnest face, a flush of crimson swept over hers in full tide, leaving it nearly colourless, as she sadly replied, "I did not come here, doctor, to hear words such as these. Forget you have said them, for they were better unsaid. It was for my uncle I was asking your advice, because I knew he would not have asked for himself. No matter ; God will help him." And, taking up her slackened bridle, she turned her pony into the homeward path.

"Miss Rayton ! Minnie ! Is this your answer ? Have I hoped for nothing ?" exclaimed Dr. Leigh, walking by the side of her pony ; for she would not stop. "For months I have cherished a hope that you were not indifferent to me. Will you crush it in a moment, and without a word ?"

"Never, by word or deed, have I given reason for your cherishing such hopes, Dr. Leigh."

"Some happier man, then"—faltering her companion.

But she stopped him short by gravely replying, "You are wrong, quite wrong. You must know that my thoughts are otherwise occupied ; you, at least,

ought to know upon what they chiefly run. Dr. Leigh, could you aid me in fulfilling what I believe to be my *mission*?" There was something half-sarcastic in the tones of her voice, that stung him the more that he felt it deserved.

"With you, I believe it possible to be anything—to do anything," was his downcast answer.

"You must possess truer motives for reform than my esteem, Dr. Leigh," replied Minnie, seriously.

"But you will allow me some hope? You don't mean to send me back to my lonely home without that? What do I care for wealth if you will not share it? I may as well throw up my practice to-morrow."

"You are wrong, doctor, and I have been blind. Had I had even a suspicion of your feelings, or that they trespassed beyond simple friendship, such as you evinced from the commencement of our ship-board acquaintance, I should not have come to-day." And Minnie looked disheartened. "It was unkind to take advantage of my blindness. I have not the shadow of a hope to give you. I cannot if I would."

He let his hand fall from the bridle, which he had again taken in his eagerness. She was in earnest—he saw it, he knew it. "Your journey, at any rate, shall not be useless," he gloomily replied; and he held the magazine he had been reading towards her. "You will find in this what purports to be the cure for desire. It may do good; I cannot say. But I wish it may bring you more happiness than you have given me." Then raising his hat, he turned through

the scrub on the left hand side of the road, while Minnie, now in tears, slowly took the nearest homeward track.

The day had not changed. The sun shone as brightly, the breeze was as sweet and refreshing; the flowers looked up with the same smiling faces that had greeted her on her way from home; and yet, to Minnie, all had changed; for the cloud was on her own spirits. The sunshine could not touch that. She was busy with the past, reviewing her own conduct, and wondering what particular part of it had proved encouragement to Dr. Leigh; in what point she had unwittingly deceived him; or whether indeed it was not his own sanguine expectations that had led to the mistake. So entirely was she engrossed with the speculations that the pony took its own course, unchecked and unguided, a course most favourable to its own inclinations, and she was far out of Clinton and on the homeward road before even the recollection of the occasion of her visit occurred to her. The sudden flutter of the leaves of the magazine she held in her hand—mechanically held, for she had not even glanced at it since it was placed there—recalled her truant thoughts, and, with a sudden start, she drew her rein, and stopped the pony's course.

The remedy was here. Dr. Leigh said so. A cure! What could he mean? And she began with eager fingers turning over page after page, scanning line after line, without making the precious discovery.

Light tales and sketches, poetry and the arts, all were passed by in indifference; they were not what she wanted; even to the last page she turned without finding the cure, and was just beginning to conclude that Dr. Leigh, in his indignation, had mocked her, when her eyes fell upon words that made her heart beat lightly with hope and joy. The thing—the very thing that was needed! How she thanked Dr. Leigh for giving it to her, when he had so much cause to withhold. With trembling fingers she tightened her hold on the reins, and drew in, as she eagerly read—

“CERTAIN CURE FOR DRUNKENNESS.

“If the love of intoxicating liquor has entwined your very vitals, strictly adhere to the undermentioned prescription, and not only the *practice*, but the *very inclination* for strong drink will subside in a few months:—

Sulphate of iron	. .	five grains.
Magnesia	ten „
Peppermint water	. .	eleven drachms
Spirit of nutmeg	. .	one „

One teaspoonful in a wine-glass of water twice a day.”

“Oh, if it only saves my uncle!” exclaimed Minnie, looking up through her tears, “how I shall bless you, Dr. Leigh, for giving it to me!” And folding the paper, she turned her pony’s head, and galloped back to Clinton much faster than she had left it, and never drew rein till she did so at the door of the German

chemist, who came out obsequiously to assist her to alight.

Giving him the receipt—of which she requested him to make up a double quantity, and also an order for the paper and envelopes in which he also dealt, Minnie went a few doors farther, to the store, to make her other purchases, which in her discomfort she had almost forgotten.

It was at a far more joyous pace, when once more safely out of the township, that Minnie passed on towards home; the woods re-echoing in her ears, "A certain cure." Poor Dr. Leigh was almost forgotten for a time, but he had certainly risen fifty per cent. in Minnie's esteem by that parting gift. She could not think unkindly of one who had done her a service of such a kind; nor was she inclined to analyse too closely the motives for the action. To her it was a valuable gift, a new weapon for her warfare against the terrible foe, a weapon she should love to wield, one of mercy and of love.

CHAPTER XXV.

MINNIE'S BOOK AGAIN.

LIKE a charm worked Minnie's famous receipt—for it was faithfully and constantly taken twice a day according to the prescription, and by degrees the terrible craving, scarcely to be borne at times, became less and less exacting. Mr. Rayton, "took" to his water diet as comfortably as though he had never been accustomed to any other. It was a work of time, of course; we do not pretend to insinuate anything else; but time brought success to the remedy, and a renewed state of health and vigour and strength was the result.

It was two or three weeks after Minnie had commenced her uncle's case, that one fine evening John came home, bringing a ray of brightness and sunshine into the house with his presence, and, as he said, completely rousing them all up.

"I declare, it's first-rate coming home this time, Minnie," he exclaimed in his usual hearty boyish manner, as he sat by his cousin's side while she buttered for him the hot scones he seemed so thoroughly to appreciate from her hands. "You all look so well and happy. Mother seems quite bright, and father has never looked better in his life."

Minnie gave a significant smile at her uncle, who, laughing and rubbing his hands together, exclaimed,—

"Getting young again, my boy—getting young again—that's it. That magical cousin had something to do with it."

"I suspected as much," replied John, nevertheless looking somewhat puzzled. "Minnie's mission is to do good wherever she is; that I believe. And all I'm afraid of is, that some one will find that out, and that the good influence will go from us elsewhere."

"Some one *has* found it out, if I am not very much mistaken," was his father's laughing reply.

"Don't be afraid, John," said Minnie, smiling, though with rather heightened colour, for the doctor's recent demonstration flashed in opportunely to her memory. "I am not going to run away for any one, so you may still expect your customary lectures and your little misdeeds as carefully registered as ever. Don't be afraid!"

"If I was but a few years older, my dear Minnie, and thought you would regard me with any favour, wouldn't I beseech you to give *me* the preference!"

"What! have you forgotten Jessie?"

He laughed, and raising his stalwart form from the table, walked to the window.

"John," said Minnie a few minutes after, laying her hand in his, "are you prepared to sign, and have you brought Jack with you?"

"Yes, to be sure; and Jack is here, being made happy and comfortable in the kitchen by Bessie. She's an old flame of his. They were engaged to be married till his unsteady habits broke the match off.

I thought his young woman was in Adelaide till lately; and so she was two or three years ago. I didn't know till just a few days ago that it was our Bessie who had turned him off."

"Our Bessie! well, I admire her spirit. She would have been wretched if she had had him while he remained unsteady. Now things have taken a different turn, however, perhaps she may not prove unforgiving. Well, how strange you did not know all this before!"

"Jack was never very communicative, and I suppose he did not care very much to talk about having had the sack, not till he viewed his own conduct in another light. He is as anxious to sign now as you are to have him; and I can tell you that the last three months both he and I have stuck to teetotalism like bricks, and have not once forfeited our right to the title. Now, don't you think we shall ornament your pledge book?"

"I have some other very ornamental names before yours, John," said Minnie, flushing with pleasure. "Now then, let us have the tea removed and my book shall come out. We will have Jack here."

"But father, you forgot him; will he like it? Had we not better go to another room?" asked John, in a surprised whisper.

"Oh no, it is not necessary; he will not mind," said Minnie, ringing the bell to conceal her smiles, and then leaving the room under pretence of searching

for her book, which this time was not just within her reach. She whispered to Bessie as she passed her in the hall, "Now, if you two girls like to sign as you told me you should this morning, you cannot do it at a better time. Master John and Jack will both sign presently. You can come in with Jack."

Never before had such a group congregated together in the sitting-room of Glen Lewin, or for such a purpose. The soft firelight, for the evening was chilly, and fires not banished when it was so, whatever the season, the soft lamplight had certainly seldom fallen upon a more interesting scene, well worthy of the photographer's power. At the table, the very centre of the group, stood our Minnie with her book spread open before her, and pens and ink near at hand; Minnie, with her rich, dark braids of hair, her soft, black, velvety eyes, with the light of joy gleaming beneath the soft fringe; Minnie, no longer in mourning, but with soft folds of cashmere of a pale rose colour flowing round her, sending a gleam of its colour, maybe, to the usually pale cheek, for a delicate rose was certainly blooming there that evening, and John thought he had never seen her looking more lovely. John himself stood by her side, with his tall manly figure and curly hair, and saucy-looking eyes; while a little way from him, Jack the shepherd—as thorough a specimen of a bushman as Minnie had ever seen—leaned with both arms upon the back of a chair, with his long hair, immense bushy beard, and *tout ensemble* savouring of

that half-civilized life peculiar to the sheep-run. A little farther on, the servants—two comely, pretty-looking, neatly dressed girls—were standing smiling and blushing and looking at each other, and curiously regarding now and then their old master, who for his part sat leaning back in his arm-chair, and winking very hard indeed at the fire; while on the opposite side, his wife, her thin cheek flushed with pleasure, alternately watched her husband and her son. She was not willing to take the first gleam of surprise in the eyes of the latter when he caught sight of the two last signatures in Minnie's pledge-book. It was well worth waiting for when it did come. Minnie had finished reading in clear, soft, yet distinct tones, the pledge inscribed in the book, and snatching up a pen with a comical flourish, John went forward to add his sign and seal, when the large trembling characters of a well-known hand, followed by a delicate ladylike signature beneath it, arrested his purpose. Springing to an erect position, and perfectly oblivious to the presence of any one around else, he first seized Minnie's hand, and shook it with all his might, finishing off with a most cousinly hug and kiss, and then with perfectly boyish enthusiasm, rushing to the arm-chair at the fireside, went through the same ceremony with his father. Not a word was said by any one, but there were tears in more than one pair of eyes, and the signing went on briskly after that. John's signature was perfectly triumphant, so was Jack's, if

one might judge by the space it took upon the sheet; good, broad, honest letters, that looked as if they were not ashamed of each other, or of their deed.

"There, Bessie; it's done, my gal! done at last. I didn't mean to have taken a drop more of the poisonous stuff if I hadn't have signed; for I'd sworn agen it in my heart this three months gone; but I'm doubly sure now," he exclaimed as he proudly walked to the door after the signatures had been effected, and touching his hat to his master, left the happy family to their own thoughts and expressions.

"Minnie," said John that night, after his father and mother had retired, coming and sitting down by his cousin on the couch by the fire, where she was dreamily watching the expiring embers; "Minnie, you are a great treasure; you have proved a real blessing to this house ever since you came, but *this* is the crowning blessing of all. I can't think how you managed it."

"Oh," said Minnie, "don't attribute all the work to me. My efforts would have been useless had not God blessed them."

"But my father; it seems wonderful! I cannot understand it. How long is it since he signed?"

"More than a month;" and then she told him of all that she knew about it; Mr. Manville's death; his own second attack—as the cause preceding the effect; of her visit to Clinton; the doctor's receipt, and its subsequent success. She did not tell him

the particulars of that visit regarding herself, but something in the slight blush on her cheek, the slight hesitation in naming Dr. Leigh that would occur however hard she tried to prevent it, rendered him suspicious, and as he rose to say good-night, he added lightly,—

“I hope you are not going to give yourself away after all to the doctor, Minnie. He's a good sort of fellow, but not the man for you; and he's no temperance man,” he significantly added, “unless he's greatly changed.”

“Dr. Leigh and myself are never likely to be closer friends than we are at present, John,” said Minnie with a warm blush that John misinterpreted.

“Rather a Jesuitical answer, Minnie, for you. It may or it may not mean more than meets the ear. I tell you, Minnie, Dr. Leigh thought more of you than of any other lady months ago, and he's not the man to stand still, or continue your platonic friendship. From what I have seen of him, I should say he would be all or nothing.”

“He is nothing then,” said Minnie, very gravely, rising from her seat. “Nothing, absolutely nothing, to me.”

“Glad to hear it,” said John, laconically. “Like to give you to a man with firmer principles when we do have to part with you; such a man as I know of, not far from here.” But Minnie ran off before he finished his sentence, and left him laughing to himself in the hall.

"I wonder whether I've hit the right nail on the head or not?" he said, as he turned into his own room. "Shouldn't wonder in the least."

John was right respecting the doctor. He would indeed be all or nothing in Minnie's esteem; but he had not quite given up the hope of being the all. After due reflection, he saw nothing so very terrific or decided in her refusal. He had surprised her, and he had no right to have taken advantage of position. He had injured, not advanced, his cause in her hands; but how to repair the mischief he scarcely knew. John's return home was an excellent pretext for his renewing his visits, and henceforth he began assiduously to court that gentleman's company, to his sincere disgust. The pretext was too shallow for John not to discover it. But Dr. Leigh, perfectly oblivious to his state of feeling, quietly slipped into his former easy state of *nonchalance*, resuming his position as though nothing had transpired, and perfectly confounding Minnie by the ease with which he ignored her whole former proceedings. She scarcely knew how to treat him; certainly there was nothing of the "rejected lover" in his demeanour, though as certainly nothing more presuming. He had no chance of showing that for her sake he could abstain as well as others had he desired it; for at her uncle's table wine and every other intoxicating liquor had become tabooed. There at any rate he had nothing else to imbibe than the limpid fluid from nature's

crystal wells, or tea or coffee. He seemed equally at ease with all; never for a moment alluding to his receipt, or inquiring its success. It was too nearly connected with certain events of that unlucky day, which he would very willingly have obliterated from the calendar, had it been possible. As it was, he did the next thing, as he said before, and quietly ignored its existence.

Jack Jones the shepherd went back to his lonely hut a happy man; for he went not without a promise from Bessie that by the time he had fully prepared a home for her reception, he could come again and claim her for his wife. Full of new ideas for the future, with a heart beating healthfully in his bosom, and a countenance fast resuming the human form divine, he went forth "to labour and to wait."

Minnie's friends, the Campbells, shared her joys as well as her sorrows. Rejoicing over the success of her mission, and encouraging her all in their power.

"It is perfectly marvellous, dear Minnie, what you have accomplished since you have been here," said Helen one day, as Minnie in riding-hat and habit sat at the open window, at Campbell Dell, watching her friend at work. She could not stay long, and did not even remove her hat.

"I feel astonished sometimes myself, Nelly, it almost seems too good; I am afraid to wake up and find it a dream," Minnie replied, bending down to

caress a fine dog that came bounding up to her as an old friend.

"We had so little hope of Mr. Rayton's improvement; so little expectation that anything could break the habit that had so long been established. After this we ought to have more confidence in other cases," and a little tinge of colour came into Helen's cheek as she spoke, betraying what other case was dominant in her thoughts.

"There is no reason, indeed, why there should not be the same success in Harry's case; I am quite sanguine about it," said Minnie brightly. "John says he is positively coming soon—very soon; I think he will be not a little astonished at the change in the household, and I shouldn't wonder that this will have some effect. Won't he be surprised at uncle's abstaining?"

"Minnie, I must warn you. Harry, when he drinks, is more violent than his father; keep out of his way as much as you can," said Helen, sadly. "You can do nothing with a madman. Above all things, don't give him access to the cellar."

"Why, no indeed. I have the keys."

"Yes, I know; but you might be frightened—terrified into giving them. Don't let him know you have them; there is no occasion. He will not be likely to suspect you, though I think it is rather a heavy trust."

"Oh, Nelly, how glad I should be, if Harry gave up drinking, and became a sensible, sober man!

How glad I should be to be the medium of promoting your union! Would it not be joyous? And why shouldn't we hope?" continued Minnie enthusiastically. "Many a more helpless case has been cured; and if Harry will but once consent to abstain, and will take my famous 'cure,' what doubt can there be of ultimate victory?" and rising from her seat, Minnie kissed her friend; and next Helen watched her flying along the road, her little figure yielding to the motion of the horse—watched her till she was out of sight, before she was conscious that another was sharing her watch.

"Is she not a darling!" she exclaimed, looking up through her tears into her brother's face. "O Alex, what would I not give if she was only our own."

He shook his head gravely. "Minnie Rayton's thoughts are elsewhere," he presently answered.

"Not surely with that doctor!" exclaimed Helen in tones of contempt. "Why, Alex, it would be positively wicked to throw herself away in such a manner."

"I did not mean that," returned her brother gravely. "I simply mean that love, as you take it, is out of her head altogether. She does not care for the doctor; she does not care for me, not at least, as I would have the woman I would make my wife care," and he turned to leave the room.

"But, Alex, you are really absurd," cried Helen, catching his arm as he left her. "Surely you would

not have Minnie so unfeminine as to give the love you have not sought ? ”

“No,” replied Alex ; “ but there are little signs and symptoms which you, Nelly, ought to know are indications of favour, which are *not* unfeminine ; and these same symptoms I have not seen.” He lightly shook off her hand, and went abruptly out.

Helen sat musing a long while over her work. Was her brother right or not ? Had she detected any of these little telegraphic signs, for which he had evidently looked with such eagerness, and deemed so all-important ? She could not say she had. Minnie Rayton was on terms of perfect freedom there ; she conversed as easily with the brother as with the sisters. It was rather a difficult matter to decide whether there was really any preference in the case or not. “But if I was Alex, and cared about her myself, I think I would soon contrive to find out ; that’s all,” she said. “He is perfectly absurd to take it so quietly.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

FLOODING THE CELLAR.

DAY by day they looked for Harry. He had left the station; that they knew, and they heard of him at intervals on the homeward track. Nothing, indeed, pleasant or cheering; Harry Rayton was the same Harry Rayton still; unchanged and wilful; "making the money fly," "having his full swing," and robbing himself of health, of reason, and of years of life.

While these floating reports came home to Glen Lewin, borne on the wings of rumour, Minnie could not look forward with pleasure to her cousin's return after his long absence from home. And yet she wished, she desired it. He ought to come now, if only to see the change wrought in his father, now temperance had quieted and beautified their home, brought back a happy smile to his mother's face, and scattered to the winds the fears that had been her constant attendants for many years. What would he say to the change? What, especially, would he think of the absence of the old silver spirit-stand on the sideboard—of the decanters on the table? What would he think of the cellar without its key? But with the last thought a great fear came over her. Was it not possible to open that cellar door by other means? And if he came home,—as she feared he

would, from the different accounts that reached them continually of his riotous doings,—in a state little short of madness or imbecility, would he scruple to use *any* means to possess himself of stimulants for his unnatural appetite? What should she do? He might never know they were in her possession, these same keys. That question might be easily avoided. But how could she stop him from breaking into the cellar, and taking forcible possession of what it contained?

A bright idea struck her as she lay in bed that night. She wondered it had never occurred to her before. Such an effectual way was in her power, by means of those keys, to render any visit her cousin might pay to the wine-cellar unavailing. The recollection of his own words brought with it the thought: “What would suit you, would be to flood the wine-cellar.” Yes, he was right; that was exactly the state of the case. She did not wish anything better. What was more, it must, it should be done. The keys were hers; the whole contents of the stores they locked away were under her control. She would not even ask her uncle’s permission. Another day should not pass over her head leaving that part of her mission unfulfilled.

To-morrow! but might not to-morrow be too late? They had been looking for Harry day and night; how could she possibly tell that he would not reach home to-morrow? Nay, even this very night, or rather early morning, for two distinct strokes from

the hall clock proclaimed it that now. And in terror she pictured to herself his eager and fruitless search for wine and spirits in every place above ground where it had been wont to be kept ; in terror she imagined his search for the keys, and his subsequent procedure, the forcing of the cellar door.

"It must not, it shall not be," she at last exclaimed. "I must, and will, put a stop to it, whatever it costs me ; it is only right that I should," and springing out of bed, she hurriedly dressed, throwing over her shoulders a large dressing-gown, and thrusting her feet stockingless into her pretty velvet slippers. Taking the little chamber-lamp and the precious keys in her hands, she stole from the room, like any mouse, quietly and softly and stealthily, though her heart beat wildly, and she shivered and trembled from head to foot. Spring had certainly "melted into summer," as we before have said, but it had still some chilly days and still more chilly nights in store ; and this was most certainly one of them. Besides, the very hour was chilly and desolate, and everything so unutterably still, that even the buzzing of a fly as it took its flight across the hall, aroused by the little light from her lamp, was distinctly audible ; and the ticking of the old clock, as she passed it on the way to the cellar, loudly monotonous. Every trivial sound is sure to be exaggerated at such an hour. No wonder, therefore, that her own footsteps, as they crossed the hall, startled her. But she had other fears ; not those of awakening the sleepers,

though even that she was anxious not to do; but the dread lest she should unexpectedly come upon Harry Rayton himself, hid away in some hole or corner, or appearing at some open door, made her nervous and trembling as she passed along. It was not so unlikely either; no impossible idea. Her experience of the Rayton family, especially of Edwin's arrival and departure, prepared her for any strange vagary on the part of the expected visitor. It was an uncomfortable thought at best, and sincerely she hoped that it would not be realized. The sight of her cousin at that moment would have dissipated her plans to the winds.

The entrance to the wine-cellar was at the back of the house. A flight of steps at one end of the veranda, protected by a light hand-rail, led to two doors, one belonging to her aunt's department, where stores of milk, cheese, and butter, of meat, and poultry, or game, for domestic consumption, were deposited; the other door opened into the wine-cellar. To reach this, Minnie had to go through both kitchens, and after carefully unlocking a little door, she came out under the veranda, and stood cautiously looking out into the darkness. How dark it was! A few tiny stars twinkling here and there amidst the vast expanse; just a few, to remind her of her Father's protecting care, of His fostering love. She needed something to nerve her for her project; for she was chill and lonely and trembling, and but for a determined purpose and strength of will, would have

turned back even now. How cold it was ! What a whispering among the trees ! what a low murmur of distant footsteps seemed around her, to her excited imagination ! Hark ! Were not those indeed footsteps ? Was not that the slow tramp of a weary horse ? No ; it was but the wind among the branches, or the indistinct murmur of the creek ; at most, perhaps, the horses in the stable, that sounds more audible because of the utter silence and solitude around. Drawing the door slightly to after her, she walked more quickly across the veranda and began to descend the steps. Summer night was it ? The atmosphere below was anything but that. Still less so, as, throwing open the door of the wine-cellar, she stepped in, and for the first time became conscious that on her part the transit from a warm bed to an underground cellar was not a very prudent one. No matter now ; the work was to do, and must be done quickly. She looked round her to ascertain the extent of her work. There was not a great deal imposed upon her. Three small barrels, a few bottles, and a keg of spirits. She commenced with the bottles. What disagreeable work it was, and how she shivered as she did it ! One after another she broke the necks of the bottles, throwing the contents of each down a drain that she discovered in the corner of the cellar. Then the spirits ; placing the light out of reach of its fumes, she turned the tap, and it was presently streaming forth its fiery torrent in the same direction. Better there, far, than down human throats ! One

after another she turned the taps of the barrels, and set them flowing, even to the last drop. Already the floor was saturated, her slippers were reeking with wine; and sick and dizzy with the fumes, and chilled to the heart with the temperature of the place, she staggered out, re-locked the door, and prepared to ascend. Certainly not with those wet slippers; she threw them off at the bottom of the steps; they were worthless now; but she would carry them away, that their presence might tell no tales. But hark!—the footsteps again! and a faint streak of approaching dawn in the sky. It was many degrees lighter than when she first came out. But the footsteps—footsteps certainly they were, and nearer—nearer. She hurried up, and had scarcely reached the top when she caught a glimpse of a tall figure in the very act of entering the kitchen door she had left open. Starting violently, she missed the step, and with a sharp exclamation, fell to the bottom, her foot completely doubled under her. With the agony of pain that followed her fall, she fainted.

Where was she? Where was she lying? Surely in her own bed. Yes; there were the graceful hangings looped up with blue rosettes—her own fanciful arrangement, and beyond that the window, through which the rich light of a rosy morning was streaming. Was it after all only a frightful dream, a terrible nightmare, that had so fearfully shaken her, causing such prostration that she did not care to move, did not feel the power to do so? Was it only that that caused the

heavy oppression at her chest? Was she dreaming still? There were voices in her room, and near her; and presently a hand was upon her pulse, and then a glad, familiar voice exclaimed, but softly, "She is conscious."

"Conscious! What did that mean? and why was Dr. Leigh there?" But a slight movement of the injured foot brought back the exquisite pain. She uttered a half cry.

"Thank God even for that! O Minnie, my child, thank God He has spared you to us!" It was her uncle that spoke. There were tears on his face as he bent over her. She looked wonderingly at him.

"Uncle, what is the matter with me?"

"You have had a slight accident, Miss Rayton," said the doctor, gently interposing. "You have been walking in your sleep, we suppose, and have fallen, and broken your ankle. I have set it already; but you must keep it perfectly still. And now if you will be so kind as to drink this, you will be able to obtain both rest and sleep."

Walking in her sleep! No; she knew now how it had all happened; and a shiver ran through her with the recollection—a shiver that brought with it a thrill of pain not only from the broken limb, but from her chest. She closed her eyes in agony, as the doctor gently raised her, and applied the glass to her lips.

"This will relieve you," he gently continued; and she drank it off unmurmuringly.

"Tell me one thing more," she faintly exclaimed. "Is my cousin Harry here?"

"Yes, Minnie, here," and he came forward to her side—"here; and grieved to have been the cause of all this."

"Thank God for this!" she whispered, as she turned to sleep. They wondered perhaps to hear her thus exclaim; but Harry did not: he knew that her thankfulness arose from the fact that he was *sober*.

Sober now; yes, truly; but at an earlier hour, when he turned to enter the kitchen door, and heard the fall and sudden shriek, he was anything but that. He had been drinking for days, and was in anything but a state of reason when he entered the precincts of Glen Lewin. Minnie's fall and shriek of agony, so unexpected, so near him, dispelled at once the fumes of the evening's debauch. He rushed forward to the top of the steps, and there by the light of the lamp—for happily, it had not fallen with her, but was where she had instinctively placed it, on the first step—he discovered his cousin, white and senseless, at the foot.

His first thought was to lift her in his arms and carry her into the house; the next, to arouse the servants. Their bedroom window was close at hand; he rapped loudly at it, and was answered by exclamations of terror from the frightened girls. "Now then, girls!" he shouted, "this is no time for fooling. Miss Minnie is out here—met with an accident—look sharp and dress, and come out, will you!"

"Miss Minnie! Why they both saw her go to her

own room for the night. Mr. Harry had come home drunk as usual, and was fooling them, that they believed." But they rose and dressed rapidly, while he stamped with impatience at this slight delay. One of them ran off to Minnie's room to ascertain the truth of his words. She returned in dismay. "It's true, for all, Bessie," she exclaimed. "Miss Minnie's not in her room." And frightened and trembling, they opened the kitchen door, and ran out.

Mr. Harry was there, and sober enough, at any rate, though in a state of great excitement too.

"Here, take hold of the lamp," he shouted hoarsely to the terrified Bessie, "and don't look scared! I expect it's all my fault," he muttered, as he began to descend the steps, "though what the mischief she was doing here at three o'clock in the morning, I should like to know, without she was walking in her sleep;" and he gently raised the senseless form, and brought her up to the veranda.

"Lead the way to her room, girls," he continued, "and stop your noise. I'll just lay her on her bed, and gallop off for the doctor. It's my belief she's broken one of her legs. Just call up father and mother, will you!"

"Bare head and bare feet; it must be a case of somnambulism surely;" but the smell of the wine with which the bottom of her dress was still wet, and the stain of wine upon the little white feet was more intelligible. So were the keys that he with difficulty took from her fast-clasping fingers, and placed upon

the toilet table. The whole thing flashed to his senses at once. In expectation of his visit, to save him from sin, she had flooded the cellar. It was all clear to him now : to save him she had sacrificed herself !

Poor little earnest working Minnie ! Her letters, with their warm urgent appeals to his better reason, her entreating, beseeching petitions that he would dash away the poison from his lips and seek a new life, a renovated existence, had not been entirely ineffective. At times, after the receipt of one of these letters, he would make a violent effort to abstain. Yes ; he would be all she wished him ; he would not barter his soul for such gain—a soul that he felt within him was immortal ; he would not reduce himself longer to the level of the beast, he would rise and shake himself from the dust of his abasement, live a new life, and Helen should after all be his. Alas ! for the human heart in all its weakness, if it trusts to its own capability of fighting against evil ! The first temptation Harry always found too strong for the feeble battery he had raised in his own strength to resist sin. Again and again for the same cause, his visit to Glen Lewin was delayed. He could not face the warm-hearted cousin who so earnestly strove to drive him away from his sin. He dare not trust himself in the presence of her who would never become his wife while her rival was the wine-cup. And so month after month rolled away ; fits of repentance and inebriation alternating, till at last a strange yearning for home, a strong desire

to look once more upon the faces he loved, took possession of him ; it was the link in the golden chain drawing him onwards to better things. He knew it not ; and even the near approach to those so dear to him could not restrain the madness that assailed him when drink and riotous companionship were attainable. What a poor miserable object he looked now, sober as he was, pale and haggard, with bloodshot eyes, whose deep shadows spoke of heavy debauch. He turned away from his own reflection as he looked in the glass, and felt how degraded he had been, and how low he had sunk in the eyes of the good.

But we anticipate. Leaving Minnie to the care of her uncle and aunt and the servants, Harry rode hard into Clinton, and happily finding the doctor at home, at once obtained his assistance. Never perhaps were horses taxed to greater speed than his own and Dr. Leigh's as they rode back to Glen Lewin. They almost flew along, and but few words with the exception of the first inquiries passed between them.

Minnie was still in an unconscious state when they arrived, nor did the setting of the broken limb restore her. Some hours intervened before she opened her eyes, as we have before said ; and when under the influence of the sleeping draught she again slept heavily, other and alarming symptoms began to develop themselves, and the doctor, who never left her side, pronounced that in consequence of exposure to sudden damp and cold, she was suffering from a severe attack of inflammation of the lungs.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD."

SICKNESS had entered that house before ; there had been muffled footsteps and earnest whispers, and grave and anxious faces ; but there was deep mourning now, and bitter tears, for the darling of the house was taken, and the gentle loving Minnie, who had been as a good spirit to the Glen Lewin household, lay hovering between life and death.

She had loving friends to watch her : Helen, and Jessie, and her aunt, and Edwin's wife, all ministering in turn around her ; nor was the least anxious devoted watcher among them poor Mrs. Wayte, the shepherd's wife, who on the first declaration of illness had entreatingly and eagerly offered her services ; Minnie was barely conscious of the loving atmosphere in which she was nursed. The intervals of reason were few, and those were passed in agony. The broken ankle was now a minor consideration ; the danger was in the lungs : a danger that in spite of all the tender care bestowed upon her, in spite of all the skill and earnest anxious solicitude of Dr. Leigh (and he was thoroughly aroused from all apathy now), proved every hour more imminent. In those moments of consciousness Minnie felt she was dying, but she had no fear ; only one anxious

thought seemed to follow her, it was of her cousin Harry. All day long, amidst the wanderings of delirium, his name was pronounced again and again ; all day long she went over and over her work in the cellar, unconsciously revealing to those around her the reason for her early rising, the work she had done, and its cause. More than once, Harry himself stood by, his face buried in his hands, and listened to her burning words, the incoherent prayers that her dying lips were pouring out for him. More than once he departed from the bedside, and threw himself along the floor of the dining-room in agony of spirit, praying that if it were possible this cup might pass from them. It was in vain ; exposure to the night air, to the cellar's damp, with insufficient clothing, and so suddenly from the warmth of the bed, the agitation of her spirits, and an early predisposition to lung disease, had accomplished an end to which there was no gainsaying.

Amidst the ravings and incoherent expressions that sometimes rapidly followed each other, there were some intervals of rest and peace, as the disease progressed ; no favourable sign, the doctor gravely intimated, but a relief to her friends from the agony and delirium that had racked the tender frame. In those intervals, words of quiet happiness and trust were breathed that betrayed the anchor hope firmly implanted within the veil, the little bark, in all its tossings to and fro, safely moored to the Rock of Ages.

"Jesus is near, dear aunt," she whispered once. "I'm not afraid: home is almost in sight."

"Minnie, my child, you must not leave us," her aunt exclaimed, with bitter wailing.

"God wills it, auntie. His will is best. I should have liked—to have finished—my mission,—but He can do that;" and she calmly closed her eyes to sleep, as though indeed resigned to all His will, even though it crossed her own.

Harry wandered up and down the house like a lost being, the prey of his own inward remorse and cravings for stimulants. "One glass of brandy, only one," he muttered again and again as he paced the floor. "After that I will drink no more. O God, pardon my weakness this once, and I will sin no more!" He uttered this aloud as he entered the room where, unknown to him, his father was sitting in silent, wordless grief. He rose as Harry entered, and coming towards him, placed his hand upon his arm.

"Harry, my son," he faltered, "I have shared the sin and the shame, and know all your torture. Do as I have done; have no more to do with the temptation; keep it aloof; tamper not with the poison; one drop leads to many."

"Have you done with drink, father? Is that what it all means? The empty sideboard, too?"

"That's what it means, Harry. These four months I have been a temperance man, Harry, and never better in my life. I had shared a drunkard's grave but for that dear girl," he faltered.

"And are you pledged?"

"Pledged, yes! irrevocably pledged; and too honourable I hope to break. Besides, my boy, the desire has gone now."

"But how did you get rid of this dreadful, fiend-like craving that pushes one on to destruction?"

"Minnie, again," said his father, huskily; and going to the cupboard, he brought a large bottle and a glass. Pouring out a teaspoonful of the mixture, and filling it up with water, he presented it to his son. "Drink it, Harry, it has cured hundreds, it has cured me; and with God's blessing will cure you. Only try it; by-and-by all desire for strong drink will go. Twice a day repeat the dose. It has saved me!"

"Yes; drink it, Harry. Oh, drink it, for my sake, —for dear Minnie's sake, who is losing her life in her desire to save yours." It was Helen who stood at his side now, her deep blue eyes upturned to his. He tossed off the mixture without a word.

"If it helps a poor weak wretch such as I am to abide by his resolution to resist temptation, it is a precious mixture indeed," said Harry, sadly.

"It has helped your father, why should it not help you?" said Helen, gently. "O Harry, how we have prayed for you! How Minnie has laboured for you and yours!"

"I know it," replied Harry. "Even with me perhaps her labour will not be in vain."

"If it proves so, she will not die with her mission

unfulfilled," said Helen in tears. "Come, Harry, she is awake; the pain has left her, and she is conscious. She asked for you."

He followed her in silence to the chamber of death, and yet how fair, how peaceful it looked! The soft glow of evening came in through the windows, tempered by the drapery of lace that crossed them. Two or three rays of the sunshine had fallen upon the carpet from the window that faced the west, like a bar of gold at the foot of the bed. There were flowers on the toilet table. A few fair flowers lay upon the bed, and Minnie, supported by pillows, rested among them, a fair, but fading flower, drooping fast.

Yes; drooping fast. That was the doctor's verdict as he felt the feeble pulse, fast losing vitality. Death's impress had gathered round the mouth and eyes, sending its strange unnatural shadows over the brow. Minnie's mission was nearly accomplished, but it seemed as if the spirit lingered yet, to put the last touch to its work; as if till then, the anxious glance of the eye, the tremulous motion of the mouth, would not yield to the calm of death.

"Harry." The tender, loving, anxious eyes turned towards him as he entered the room and came and stood at her side.

"Dear Minnie, you asked for me," he faltered, for he felt that for the first time he was face to face with death. He saw that his cousin was passing rapidly away. What did she want with him?

She feebly clasped his hand ; but even as she did so, the gentle eyes closed, and one of the fitful dozes supervened. They were all gathered there : uncle, and aunt, and cousins, and John in his hasty travelling dress, fresh from a journey, was bending down in suppressed anguish at the foot of the bed. There was deep silence while she slept. The doctor, with hard lines of care upon his face, sat motionless, one finger upon the feeble, fluttering pulse that was counting out the few remaining strokes of life ; and Harry, with one hand still in that gentle clasp, stood still, with his face shielded by the other, while more than one tear escaped his eyes. Helen saw the token of his feeling through her own tears, and softly laid her hand upon his arm.

They were standing so when Minnie, with a faint sigh, once more re-opened her eyes. They rested anxiously upon them.

"Harry, is it yes or no ?" she whispered faintly, for life's currents ran very low and tremulously.

"Yes ; God helping me !" he exclaimed in earnest tones. "Dear Minnie, I will do what you wish."

A smile of joy came over the dying face like a passing sunbeam. Her eyes looked anxiously round towards the writing-case on the drawers.

"The book," said Jessie, sobbing ; "the pledge-book, she wants that. Here it is, I will bring case and all to the bed." She spread it open before Harry.

Minnie glanced lovingly up at him again. "Sign," she said, "read and sign."

He read it through blinding tears, and the name that followed, tremulously as it was written down, was written in prayer.

The smile that came again to the pale lips was beautiful to behold. "Mission is ended," she whispered. "Bless God for it! He is good—so good! Helen, you will be Harry's bride now? you will watch over and help him now?"

Helen Campbell bent low over the dying one, kissing her fondly, whispering back, "Dear Minnie, I will."

"It is nearly over; I am nearly home. How sweet is rest!" and the dark eyes gently closed again. There was a great hush once more throughout the chamber. Even the weeping was suppressed that the momentary rest might not be disturbed. It might have been death that sleep, for scarcely a flutter of the pulse was visible, scarcely a breath passed the lips, so fast paling to flush no more. There she lay, passing away to her rest in the full glory of womanhood. Yet, even as a ripe shock of corn, for the harvest of her life was over, her work was done, and of her most assuredly might be recorded, "She hath done what she could."

But there was yet something to be done—a farewell to be taken of each. The eyes once again opened on earth to fulfil her spirit's bidding. How tenderly those adieus were spoken one by one! just as if indeed the passage over the dark river was simply a passage home. The river of death with

her was low, as it was with Bunyan's pilgrim. She felt the bottom beneath her feet; she saw the shining ones waiting to welcome her; she knew that beneath her were "the everlasting arms," safely bearing her through. Loving were the words that falteringly fell from her dying lips, words long remembered by each; by none longer than by Harry and his father. She turned at last to Dr. Leigh. He was standing watching her by the side of Edwin and his wife. The anxious look came back into her face.

"Dear Edwin—doctor,—will you not grant a last wish—for Minnie's sake—sign." The words came with evident difficulty; but they were words that must be said. It had flashed to her mind that her work was not yet done—that more remained behind: it was this; oh, could they deny her?

They could not—Edwin bent down and whispered, "Darling Minnie, I will;" and firmly in sight of the fading eyes he dashed his pledge. The pen was taken up by the doctor. Slowly and deliberately he wrote, as though weighing the value of every letter.

"Thank you, dear Minnie, for remembering me," he bitterly exclaimed, as he threw it down again, and turned away.

"Thank you, doctor. My mission is fully ended. God help you all to follow me. Jesus only—can—help—you—save you! Good-bye!"

They were Minnie's last words. The eyes drooped lower; the pulse beat more fitfully; the breath passed quietly away. By-and-by they raised their weeping

eyes, and saw that the pure ransomed spirit had indeed flown.

Weep now, mourn now, as they might, they could not win back the truant spirit to the loved clay; no sound of wailing could disturb that perfect rest, no grief arouse the sleeper. Minnie's mission on earth was over; she had gone to the place where the mansions prepared were awaiting her,—where the triumphant songs and the crown and the palm-branch were to be her portion. Happy spirit! there she would await the arrival of those who were to be the stars in her crown—jewels to shine resplendent to all eternity!

Once before, years ago, Glen Lewin's windows had been shrouded by the hand of death. Once before, and only once, had its portals closed for the last time on the loved and lost. The blossom and the flower alike nipped, seemingly, by untimely wind; transported both to fairer shores and happier climes. But the voice of wailing for each was very bitter; and for a time, Glen Lewin was a sadly desolate home.

They brought violets, blue and white, and filled the pale hands with the blossoms, and scattered them lightly over the delicate muslin dress, in which they had tenderly robed her for her last resting-place on earth. The perfume was very sweet; but sweeter far, and more enduring, the "mission" for which she had so eagerly laboured, and prayed, and sought. Did we say that mission was ended? No, reader, no; its

after-influence was far-spreading and abiding; and Minnie's life and Minnie's work brought many names into the precious pledge-book that Harry had eagerly taken possession of.

"Let me keep it, father; it will help me as much as the 'cure,'" he eagerly asked; and his father consented.

There was a large gathering of mourners the day that all that remained of Minnie Rayton was committed to the dust. Mr. Duncan, from Belmont, conducted the funeral rites; and there were many present who will never forget the impressive words that fell from his lips. Feelingly he dwelt on the young life, devoted to fight against sin—to fight for God; earnestly he pointed to the beauty of her mission, its arduous character, to its ultimate success. And then looking upwards, he spoke of the ransomed spirit, receiving its reward, its welcome into rest.

There were few dry eyes that day among the large gathering of people that came to witness the last of the young and earnest worker; and many came forward afterwards and begged Mr. Duncan to hold a meeting in Clinton that evening, that they might band themselves together, and each have the honour of signing their names in Minnie's pledge-book.

There was one silent mourner in Campden Dell that few suspected. With bowed head and bowed heart Alex Campbell had sat day by day during Minnie's illness. He did not go to Glen Lewin though urged repeatedly to do so. He could not look upon

the fading away of all his hopes. Nor was he among whose who stood around her grave. No; while they there gathered around that grave, he was in earnest prayer at home, struggling for submission, for resignation, entreating that the falling mantle might rest upon his shoulders; that "Minnie's Mission" might be permitted to continue and extend. He rose up from his knees a stronger and a wiser man. They saw him going about his usual occupations, but only Helen knew how deeply he felt. He never married; but pursued a daily course of usefulness; luring many a sinner away from his sin to the Saviour, till, like Minnie, he also entered into rest.

Harry, like his father, was saved. With faltering footsteps he trod his new path, beset with pitfalls and briars and thorns as it was to him. The precious "cure" worked well and perfectly; and with Helen as his helper, her love as his support, and her promise as his future hope, he persevered faithfully twelve months, when, as with his father, all desire for stimulants ceased, and he took her home as his bride.

Edith's home was a happy one. No fears disturbed her. Her brother returned gladly to her care, and was soon put in possession of a lucrative office, first having entered his name in "Minnie's band of hope." And Edwin grew more thoroughly domesticated than ever, his wandering habits gradually subsiding into love for his own fireside.

The old folks at Glen Lewin went quietly on their way, till they at last passed off, possessors of the

"sure and certain hope of immortal joy," and leaving Glen Lewin to John and his young wife, Jessie. They never forgot to mourn for Minnie, never forgot her loving influences. They tenderly loved her, even as their own daughter; and better still, they learnt to love her God, and died rejoicing in His name.

And the doctor! what became of him? Gentle reader, we do not know; only indeed, that giving up his extensive practice, he sailed, shortly after Minnie's death, for England. Some—the ill-natured and censorious of Clinton—say it was to escape the jeers and laughs that his temperance principles would subject him to. We incline to believe it was rather to cleave himself by one vigorous effort from the companionship with which he had become entangled; so firmly resolved was he for Minnie's sake to keep her dying wish, and thus firmly to put a closing seal on "MINNIE'S MISSION."

FINIS.

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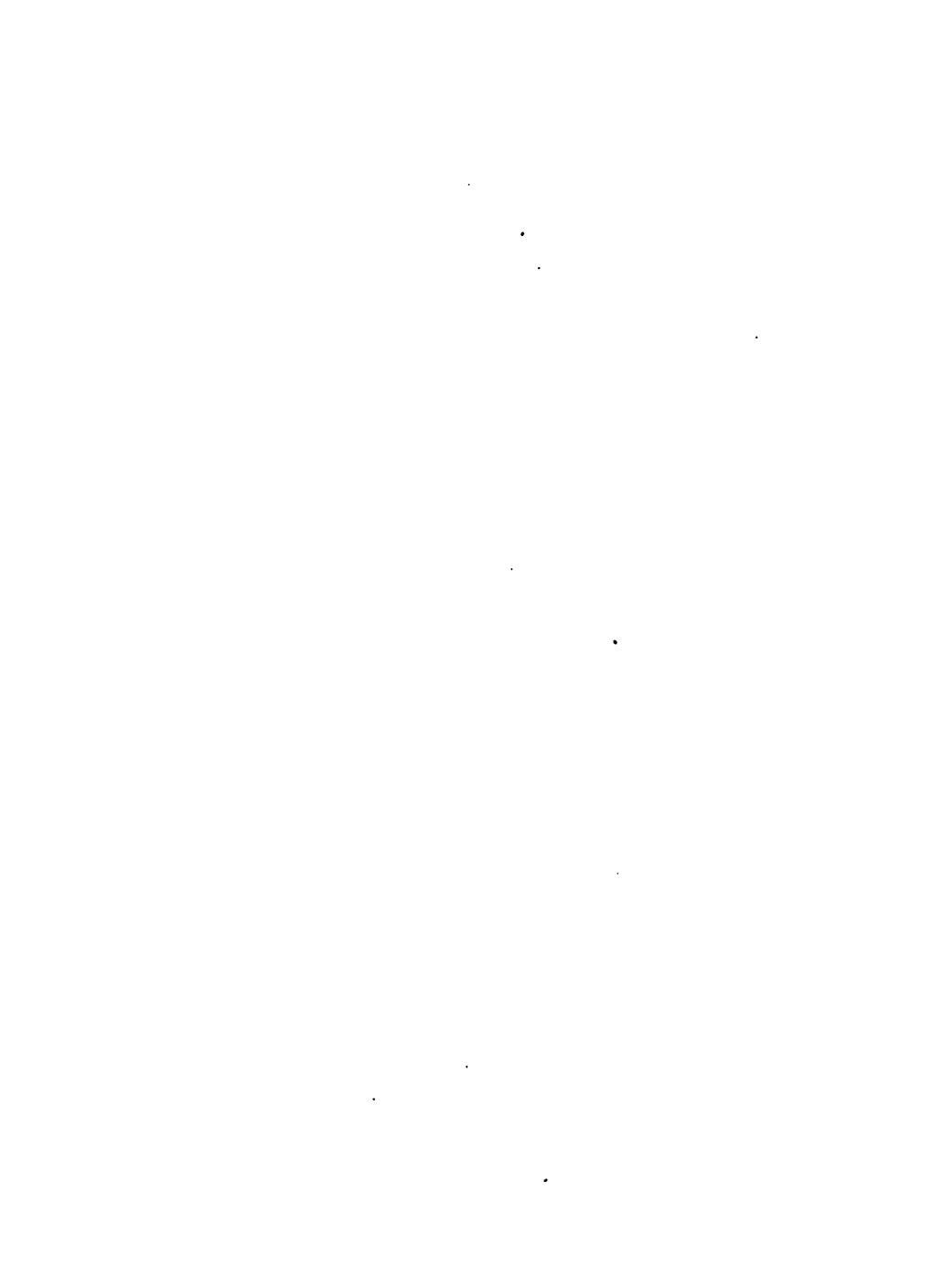
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